

Alzheimer's: 7 tips for medical visits

Regular medical care is an important part of Alzheimer's treatment. Use these seven tips to make the most of the time you have with your loved one's doctor.

By Mayo Clinic staff

People who have Alzheimer's disease need regular medical care to address a range of health and behavioral issues, some related to Alzheimer's and some not. Either way, if a member of your family has Alzheimer's, you're sure to have lots of questions — and limited time with the doctor. To ensure the most productive medical appointments, consider these seven tips.

1. Schedule wisely

Plan appointments for your loved one's best time of day and, if possible, when the doctor's office is least crowded. Bring snacks and water, and an activity your loved one enjoys.

2. Be prepared

Make a list of issues you'd like to address with the doctor, such as concerns about medication side effects or aggressive behavior. Put your primary three concerns at the top of the list so that you're sure to cover what's most important to you. Also take note of your loved one's medications, even over-the-counter medications and supplements. You can either make a list of everything your loved one takes or bring the labeled containers in a bag.

3. Be specific

Be ready to answer questions about your loved one's symptoms and behavior. Have you noticed any changes in your loved one's mood? Is your loved one able to eat regular meals? Does your loved one seem to be uncomfortable in any way? Has your loved one shown any aggressive behavior? As the disease progresses, your insight may be the critical factor in determining what's best for your loved one.

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4. Take notes

Bring a note pad and pen so that you can jot down the main points of the doctor's explanation. You might also record the conversation on your cell phone or another device so that you can listen to it again later. Better yet, bring a friend or another family member and ask him or her to take notes or to stay with your loved one while you take notes. If you don't understand something the doctor tells you, ask for clarification.

Also think about seating arrangement in the doctor's office. If your loved one sits next to the doctor and you sit beyond, the doctor can address questions directly to your loved one — and you can nod your head to confirm or refute your loved one's responses.

5. Consider the future

Ask the doctor to discuss what to expect in the next year or two. You might ask about advance directives, long term care or nursing home placement. You might also discuss hospice or palliative care. Knowing what to expect can help you prepare.

6. Ask for referrals or recommendations

If you need help, ask. The doctor can refer you to various community resources, such as meal services, senior centers, respite care and support groups.

7. Deal promptly with conflict

If something annoys you about a particular appointment or if a misunderstanding arises, discuss it with the doctor right away. Work as a team to resolve the problem, rather than rushing to switch doctors. A change could be confusing to your loved one and detrimental to his or her care in the long run.

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/alzheimers/AZ00029>

http://www.mayoclinic.com/images/pdfs/a14_checklist.pdf