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## 5 Ways to Help Your Doctor Help You

by Elizabeth Cohen

(CNN) Dr. Adam Dimitrov doesn't play favorites with patients. But he does have a few favorite patients -- ones who make it easy for him to do his job well.

Bring details about treatment you're getting from other health professionals to every appointment.

Take one of his patients who had a liver transplant. Dimitrov is her internist, and she arrives at every visit with a folder. Inside is a list of the medications she's taking, copies of letters from her other doctors and results of her latest imaging studies and lab tests.

This way, Dimitrov isn't searching through her chart for papers that might -- or very well might not -- be there.

"She makes sure that nothing falls through the cracks," he said. This way, he can use their time together to take better care of her.

Now, wait a minute. Shouldn't a doctor have everything -- reports from other physicians, lab test results -- right there? Why is it the patient's responsibility to bring them in?

It's true: In an ideal world, a doctor would have your health history, the medications you're taking and lab results right in front of him. But we live in reality, and the reality is that these things are often lost in a mound of paperwork. So here are five things you can do to help your doctor help you.

### 1. Bring in a list of medications

Don't waste your precious moments with the doctor saying, "Ummm, I think I take a yellow pill in the morning -- or is it pink? And maybe I take it twice a day?" She's a doctor, not a mind reader. Write a list with the name of the drug, the dosage and how often you take it. "It's surprising and unfortunate how much time is wasted when that list isn't together," said Dimitrov, a family doctor in Baltimore, Maryland.

### 2. Come armed with your personal health history

You had your appendix out when? Grandma had Huntington's disease -- or was it Hodgkin's disease? You had a stent for your clogged artery back in '93 ... or was it a balloon? Your doctor wants to know, and you shouldn't rely on your memory (this is particularly important if you have a complicated medical past).

### 3. Bring in your recent test results and doctors' notes

If Dr. Smith the orthopedist ordered an MRI of your bum knee, you should assume that Dr. Jones the rheumatologist has not seen it. You should also assume the two docs haven't spoken to each other. So before your appointment with Jones to nail down the source of your knee pain, get a copy of Smith's notes from your latest visit and a copy of those MRI results.

#### **4. Make a list of your concerns**

Dr. Dana Frank, an internist at Johns Hopkins, tells his patients to come in with a written-out list of their top three concerns for each visit. He says it makes the appointment more focused and useful for the patient.

This may sound silly -- after all, you made the appointment, and you know why you're there -- but remember that fuzzy thinking is pretty common when you get to the exam room. Frank said, "What I really want is for patients to be prepared like the Boy Scouts."

Also, if you feel like the doctor is rushing you, ask him to slow down. "There is nothing wrong with saying, 'I feel you are rushing me. I am getting nervous; I can't tell you what I need to tell you,'" Frank said.

#### **5. Don't ask your doctor insurance questions**

Don't bother, because he's clueless. "We never know the answer to what is or isn't covered by your insurer," said Dr. Jim Braude, an internist in Atlanta. "Questions about insurance just take away time in the exam room that should be about your health." Insurance questions are, of course, important; a member of your doctor's office staff should know the answer.