

# Getting the Most Out of Your Medical Appointments

Epilepsy can often be a complex condition. It can affect one's life in many ways. In order to minimize the impact of epilepsy, it's important to maximize the effectiveness of medical appointments. The following are some tips to help you get the most out of this relatively brief interaction:

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## *Tell Your Doctor About...*

- seizures you've had since your last appointment (including auras or "minor" seizures)
  - how many?
  - how often?
  - what time of day?
  - how long they lasted?
  - what they were like?
  - is there a pattern you've noticed?
- what happened before your seizures
  - was there an aura or other warning?
  - was there a trigger (e.g. missed medication, lack of sleep, stress)?
  - were you taking your medication as prescribed?
- what happened after your seizures
  - what symptoms did you have (e.g. drowsiness, weakness, inability to talk, confusion, depression, etc.)?
  - how long did these symptoms last?
- any other symptoms you've had
  - possible medication side effects
  - problems with memory, attention, thinking, or language
  - depression or anxiety
- any treatment changes
  - any new medications you started taking since your last visit (including over-the-counter medications)
  - any complementary or alternative treatments you are using (e.g. neurofeedback, herbal therapies, supplements, special diets, etc.)
  - any changes in the appearance, name, or labeling of the antiepileptic medication you receive from the pharmacist
  - any prescriptions that need to be refilled

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## *If You Don't Already Know, Ask Your Doctor About...*

- what type of seizures you have
- what type of epilepsy you have
- what the various test results mean (e.g. EEG, MRI, blood levels, etc.)
- whether you should keep a seizure journal, and what specifically you should keep track of
- health and safety risks related to epilepsy, and how to reduce those risks
- what you can do to improve your seizure control
  - healthy sleep habits
  - stress management
  - healthy diet and exercise
  - taking medications as prescribed
  - avoiding alcohol
  - other approaches
- what other treatment options may be available to you if your current treatment doesn't end up working
  - other medications
  - brain surgery
  - vagus nerve stimulation
  - ketogenic diet and other dietary approaches
  - complementary therapies
  - experimental treatments

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Consider taking a family member or friend with you to your appointments. This person can take notes, provide descriptions of seizures and side effects, and remind you of questions that you wanted to ask. If you have remaining questions that haven't been answered by the end of the appointment, ask if another member of the healthcare team (e.g. a nurse, nurse practitioner, physician's assistant, social worker, etc.) can help you. Also ask your doctor what to do if you have questions between appointments.



**For more information on epilepsy and how to work with your healthcare team, please contact Epilepsy Foundation of Michigan at 800-377-6226.**