



What if You Don't Even Know What to Ask?



Sometimes, the hardest part of speaking up is knowing what to ask in the first place.

You may be told that you need a test, medication, procedure, induction, surgery, or another intervention. You may hear a medical term you've never heard before. You may even be given information that sounds important but don't know what questions would help you understand it. That's okay. But, making sure you understand before you agree, disagree, or walk away is important.

You don't have to know the right questions to ask for an explanation.

If you don't remember any of the tips or tools that we give you, and are just unsure what to ask, you can always just say something like, ***"I don't know what I don't know. Can you help me understand details about how this could affect me (and my baby) and what I should be considering before I make a decision?"***

Your healthcare team should take time to help identify the information you need.

Asking questions is only the first step. A truly informed decision happens when you:

- ✓ Feel your questions were fully answered.
- ✓ Understand the information provided.
- ✓ Know and understand your options.
- ✓ Understand both the possible benefits and possible risks of accepting or declining
- ✓ Have enough time (when appropriate) to think.
- ✓ Know what could happen if you decide to wait.
- ✓ Feel your values and preferences were included in the conversation.



Village Tip: Offer to attend prenatal appointments, childbirth classes, or hospital tours if you're invited. Another set of ears can help remember important information and provide emotional support.

When Something Comes Up Unexpectedly

Sometimes, you don't have time to prepare questions ahead of time.

A healthcare professional may enter the room and say something like:

"We're about to get this labor going while preparing a medication." or ***"It's time for your vaginal exam."*** or ***"We're going to start your medication."***

You may feel surprised, worried, or pressured to immediately agree because saying things like this can sound like you don't have an option. You do. Before responding, take a breath.

If the situation is not an emergency, you can ask: ***"Can you give me a moment to understand what you're recommending?"*** Just because something sounds "routine" or "normal" doesn't mean you have to agree to having it done.

When You Don't Understand the Recommendation

You don't have to pretend you understand. You can ask questions. Consider these:

- "I want to make sure I understand before I agree. Can you explain that again?"
- "Can you explain that without the medical terminology?"
- "Can you give me an example of what that would look like and why it is being done?"
- "Can you explain the most important thing you want me to understand about this?"

When You Need Time or Information

- "I understand that you are making a recommendation. I need a little more time to process this information."
- "I'd like to talk this over with my partner?"
- "Can you write down the name of the medication/procedure so I can make sure I understand what we're discussing?"
- "What information should I review before making this decision?"



Sis, needing more time to understand is not the same as refusing care.



Sis, It's OK to ask your provider to explain something in a way that you understand. You deserve answers that make sense to you.



Sis, Asking questions and advocating for your care and your baby's care does not make you a difficult patient.

Communicating After Your Appointment

If you leave an appointment still feeling confused or experience changes in your condition, it's okay to call back to ask for clarity or report those changes. Understanding your care is part of receiving good care. Reporting changes helps to guide your care.

Ask your providers how to communicate with them after your appointment if you need to. There may be a communication portal, or specific number you can call.



If you need to contact them after a visit, you can say something like, ***"I was seen today (or on _____, but something has changed since then."*** Be as specific as possible when explaining yourself, asking your questions, and describing your condition. Specific information helps your healthcare team understand what has changed. Ex: ***"Since yesterday, I've developed a severe headache that hasn't improved with rest and fluids."*** or ***"My baby was moving normally yesterday, but today the movement is noticeably different."***



Think about a time when you felt heard and supported in your healthcare. What made you feel that way? _____

Think about a time when you did NOT feel heard and supported in your healthcare. What made you feel that way? _____

What would you do the same or differently to ensure that you are heard and treated appropriately and timely? _____

List 3 Reflective Thoughts

- _____
- _____
- _____