

# DOCTOR RELATIONSHIPS



Medical researchers generally agree that people who trust their doctors and work together with them recover more quickly, have a better quality of life and are more satisfied with their treatment. But these days when the conversation turns to medical care, complaints about doctors often outpace compliments. “He never looks me in the eye. He just stares at his computer.” “She rushes me out the door before I finish telling her what’s wrong.” “He’s a cold fish.” Does this familiar? If so, here’s how to make sure your concerns are heard.

## How To:

1. **First things first.** Before your next appointment, make a list of the problems you’d like to talk about and start the conversation with the one that concerns you most. Do a bit of research into your questions so you are informed. Putting your main worries up front gives you time to focus on them.
2. **Hey, look at me.** Electronic health records, the computerized version of a handwritten chart, have become the new normal at office visits. If you find yourself speaking to your doctor’s back and he answers as he types, say, “I’d feel more comfortable if you looked at me while we talked.” Practice in front of a mirror if you need to work up your courage to confront him.
3. **Get personal.** Doctors are human and sometimes need a little attention from you. A kind word and an appreciative smile can go a long way toward strengthening the bond between you.
4. **Speak up.** If you raise a question about your illness that stymies your doctor, don’t just nod and let the matter drop. Experts suggest that you ask for a referral to a specialist who routinely deals with that problem. You may feel uncomfortable seeking an appointment with someone else, but it’s a reasonable request and insurance generally covers the cost.
5. **What matters most.** When your doctor recommends a medical procedure or non-emergency surgery, let him know you’d like some time to think it through and schedule a follow-up call. What matters to your doctor is curing or alleviating what ails you; what matters to you could be how long it will take you to heal, when you can go back to work, or whether you can continue with your favorite sport. It’s important that your doctor knows that.
6. **Keep in touch.** Find out how to reach your doctor between appointments. Does she prefer email, leaving a message with her nurse, or voice mail? If you use the method, she likes best, you’re more likely to be in touch with her sooner rather than later.
7. **Less is more.** Bring along a one- or two-page summary of recent tests and treatments so your doctor can get up to speed quickly. There are no hard-and-fast rules about format; you can draw a timeline or prepare a list. This short version will save time and may help you avoid repeat tests and imaging.

## Effort

Spend 30 minutes researching your questions using websites with valid scientific information. Allow 10 minutes to make your list of questions. Pulling together a summary of recent tests and treatments may take between 20 minutes and an hour, depending on how organized you are. Meetings with doctor’s average about 20 minutes, so make the most of your time.