

Supporting Someone Who is Going to the Doctor

It can be hard for a doctor to figure out what health problem(s) may be affecting a person with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD), especially if the person has limited communication. Most doctors are busy and try to keep appointments within a limited time frame. Therefore, it is critical to be well prepared to make the most of the time spent with the doctor.



Making an Appointment

It is a good idea to understand the process for making an appointment and build a relationship with the receptionist. Have the accommodation needs of the person ready to discuss. If waiting in the waiting room is difficult, it may be possible to schedule the first appointment of the day or the first appointment after the doctor's lunch break to minimize time spent in the waiting room. If noisy active spaces are difficult be prepared to ask for a sensory friendly space. If there is a lot to ask the doctor, it may be possible to schedule a double appointment.

Being Prepared

- To help the person be ready for the visit, explain why (and when) they are going. It is important that the person is clear about the reason for the visit. If they are anxious, provide reassurance.
- Ask in advance what questions they may have for the doctor and write them down.
- The person can take someone with them for support if they choose.
- If there is a behavior support plan, share that with the doctor and office staff.
- Have any supported decision making or guardianship information ready if needed.



If an Accommodation Is Needed

It is important to ask for accommodations in advance or when making the appointment. Encourage the person to tell the scheduler or the receptionist what kind of accommodation(s) they would like to request and let them decide what works best for them. It is a good idea to get accommodation requests included as part of the person's medical record if possible.

During the Visit

- Encourage the person to ask any questions they would like answered.
- If you are accompanying the person during their visit, ask the doctor to talk directly to the person. For example, the doctor should explain if they want to examine the person and check with the person if that is okay. Model how the doctor can talk to the person about health issues. Check if the person wants to ask any questions.
- Make sure the person clearly understands all information needed to decide about treatment options. Remember, the doctor needs consent from the person or a “person responsible”, usually a guardian or family member.
- If a new medication is being prescribed, support the person to ask about side effects or any other questions they have about the medication.
- Ask the doctor to write down instructions in plain language and explain difficult words.

After the Visit

- Check that the person understood what happened and what the doctor said.
- Work with the person to make sure there is a system in place to carry out any instructions they received from the doctor. Think about who needs to know about the instructions and who can help with any necessary monitoring.
- Determine whether or not other health care professionals need to know what the doctor said. For example, a psychologist who is helping with the person’s behavior or a speech pathologist who is helping with swallowing problems may need to be aware of any new medical information.
- If the person is not clear on what the doctor recommended, support them in calling the doctor’s office, if necessary. Some doctors are also happy to clarify things by email.
- Help the person plan when they should go back to the doctor.

For more information:

This link provides you with some important questions you may want to ask your doctor:

[Be More Engaged in Your Healthcare | Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality \(ahrq.gov\)](https://www.ahrq.gov)

Resource:

MY PROFILE Card

Related Fact Sheets:

#2 Supporting Self Advocacy

#4 Helping Communications with the Doctor

This fact sheet was edited in April 2024. It contains general information only and does not address individual circumstances.

This fact sheet is adapted from materials developed by NSW Council for Intellectual Disabilities (2009), Australia. Its components are supported in part by Grant/Cooperative Agreement #5 U27 DD000014 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Disability and Health Branch. The contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official reviews of the CDC.