

The Five A's

Dealing with health issues for yourself or for a loved one can be overwhelming. Often, there are a lot of emotions tied to the experience, and a lot of new and sometimes complicated pieces of information to process. To make it a little easier, we've taken some of the key concepts from ***Searching for Health*** and distilled them into a short list—the Five A's, below—and included a few worksheets to help you take control of your health journey.

Arrange your information

Even before you need to see a medical professional, it can be useful to organize all your health information in a place you can access easily. The information can include things like your medical history, medications, and current symptoms. When you do need to visit a doctor, having the information in one place will make it easier for them to understand your medical issues and it will help you keep track of how any treatment or advice is affecting your condition.

Set an **Agenda**:

Many doctors have a list of things they want to discuss with their patients, and it can sometimes be hard to bring up your concerns. Make sure to set your own agenda for a doctor's visit. Write down your goals and all the questions you want answered—are you hoping for a diagnosis, for example, or a prescription? Bring the list with you to the appointment.

Ask questions

Early in your appointment, be sure to let your doctor know about your agenda so you have time to discuss your items. Ask the questions you want answered. If you are getting a new treatment or surgery that you are not sure about, consider asking about best case and worst case scenarios using the included worksheet.

Advocate for yourself

Be sure to speak up for yourself and voice your concerns. If you're not sure how to ask, there are some scripts included in the worksheet to help you find a way to talk collaboratively about tough subjects. And don't hesitate to get a second opinion if you're not comfortable with the approach your doctor is recommending or even just as a double-check prior to a major procedure or treatment.

Take **Action**

Follow through on the plan that you come up with your doctor.

*This content is derived from *Searching for Health*, a peer reviewed book published by Johns Hopkins Press. It gives you a framework that you can use whenever you are searching for answers to big decisions about your health. The approach is guided by research studies and publications from credible institutions such as the National Institutes of Health and the National Academy of Medicine, and takes inspiration from the frameworks that doctors use in practice every day. The goal is not to replace your doctor but to provide a set of tools that you can use to improve your ability to find the right information to guide decisions about your health. Please visit <https://jhupbooks.press.jhu.edu/title/searching-health> or call 1-800-537-5487 to order *Searching for Health**

ARRANGE your information

Medical History

Medical conditions

List all your current medical conditions and the year in which you were diagnosed:

List any medical conditions that have resolved

Here is a short checklist to help jog your memory and make sure you have a complete list.

Cancer Heart Attack Heart Murmur High Blood Pressure High Cholesterol
 Diabetes Pneumonia Asthma COPD Broken Bones Concussion Seizure
 Migraine Multiple Sclerosis Stroke/TIA ADHD Alcohol Abuse Anorexia/Bulimia
 Anxiety Disorder Drug Dependency Depression HIV/AIDS Chlamydia
 Gonorrhea Genital Herpes Thyroid Disease Chronic Kidney Disease Kidney
Stones Glaucoma Cataracts Anemia Bleeding Disorder Blood Clot/Clotting
Disorder Polycystic Ovary Syndrome Hearing Loss Hay Fever Eczema Recurrent
Sinus Infections Celiac Disease Irritable Bowel Syndrome Stomach Ulcer
Ulcerative Colitis Crohn's Disease Polyps in Colon Arthritis

Surgeries

List your prior surgeries

Here is a short checklist to help you make a complete list

- (Date: _____) Appendectomy
- (Date: _____) Adenoidectomy
- (Date: _____) Ear Tubes
- (Date: _____) Gallbladder Removal
- (Date: _____) Knee ACL Repair (Left/Right)
- (Date: _____) Knee Arthroscopy (Left/Right)
- (Date: _____) Ovarian Cyst Removal
- (Date: _____) Tonsillectomy
- (Date: _____) Weight Loss Surgery
- (Date: _____) Other Prior Surgeries

Medical History

Medications

List all medications that you are currently taking, including the dosage and start date. It might be helpful to note if you need refills as a reminder for your next visit.

List any supplements, herbs, and natural health products:

Are you allergic to any medications? If yes, which ones?

Medical History

Family History

This chart helps you keep track of major diseases in your blood relatives.

	Mother	Father	Siblings	Grandparents
Alcoholism				
Blood Clots/Clotting Disorders				
Breast Cancer				
Colon Cancer				
Melanoma				
Other Cancer				
Diabetes				
Drug Dependency				
Heart Disease				
High Blood Pressure				
High Cholesterol				
Mental Illness				
Other Conditions				

Set an AGENDA

Medical Agenda

What do you want most out of this visit (for example, a diagnosis to explain your symptoms, treatment to relieve pain, help with managing a condition)?

What other things would you like to get out of this visit (for example, a prescription refill, recommendations to improve overall health, advice on other conditions)?

Administrative Agenda

Are there any administrative things that you need out of this visit (for example, signatures on any school- or work-related forms, printed copies of your medical records, booking a future appointment)?





Notes

Do you have any insights or assumptions that you have already made about any of the items that you have listed above? For example, if you're hoping that your doctor will give you a diagnosis to explain your symptoms, do you already have an idea based on your online research as to what the diagnosis might be?

ASK questions

Worksheet Best Case and Worst Case Scenarios

Ask your doctor about the best-case and worst-case scenarios of the treatment or surgery and where you likely fall between these two extremes. Then, ask what would be the best outcome if you didn't have the treatment, and what would be the worst that could happen. Find out where you fall between these scenarios. Use the worksheet to help you take notes.

	Treatment	No Treatment	
Best Case			Best Case
		<p>← Place a dot to indicate where your doctor thinks you fall between the extremes →</p>	
Worst Case			Worst Case

Adapted from Kruser JM, Taylor LJ, Campbell TC, et al. "Best case/worst case": training surgeons to use a novel communication tool for high-risk acute surgical problems. Journal of Pain and Symptom Management. 2017;53(4):711-719.e5.

ADVOCATE for yourself

It can sometimes be helpful to have a script to advocate for yourself with your doctor.

I'm worried about X symptom because of Y reasons.

The goal here is to be explicit about the symptoms you are most worried about and why. Phrasing your thinking this way will give your doctor more context and allow them to directly address your concerns.

I am worried that I have X disease because of Y reasons.

If you are worried about a specific disease, let your doctor know and be sure to include the reason. The added information can help your doctor decide whether the disease you are worried about should be considered as a possible diagnosis.

Could you let me know about your working diagnosis so I understand the situation better?

This helps you understand the doctor's working diagnosis and allows you to do additional research to learn more about the condition.

Is there anything else it could be?

This helps you understand what is on the doctor's list of possibilities (the differential diagnosis).

Is there a reason you are not considering X condition?

This question might help you address any lingering concerns about a diagnosis you are worried about.

Will any of the tests you ordered confirm or rule out the diagnosis?

This gives you more insight into the testing.

Are there any symptoms I should be on the lookout for?

This will give your doctor a chance to let you know about any red flag symptoms, which might require you to seek immediate care.

Should I change anything about my daily routine while we wait for the test results to come in?

This may uncover immediate changes that might improve your health and, depending on whether your condition is potentially infectious, protect those around you.

Where can I learn more?

Your doctor may be able to provide printed materials or suggest a website.

Take ACTION

Once you have discussed all the options with your doctor and you have come to an agreement on what treatment to pursue, continue to take action. One of the simplest ways is to actively monitor your health during and after treatment, using a health tracker like this one.

Health Tracker

List as many symptoms as you are experiencing as well as any other metrics the doctor has asked you follow such as blood pressure, blood glucose etc

Symptom/Metric	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun

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