



6 Tips for talking to a doctor about your symptoms

Talking to a, trusted doctor about your symptoms is important.

If you need to find a new family doctor, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC can give you a list of doctors accepting patients in your area.

MAKING YOUR APPOINTMENT:

- Book a longer than usual appointment. It is okay to ask for a double appointment time. Let the doctor's office staff know that you need extra time.
- Consider bringing a friend or family member with you for support. That person can also help describe your symptoms if you're unable or take notes for you.
- Get help if language is a barrier between you and your doctor. There are interpreters that can help over the phone or by being with you in person. Ask the doctor's office staff if this service is available. If an interpreter service is not available bring someone you trust to interpret for you.

GETTING READY FOR YOUR APPOINTMENT:

- Write a list of all of your symptoms and take it with you. List your body symptoms such as feeling tired or difficulty sleeping as well as what you are thinking, feeling and doing. Your doctor can help you best if she or he knows all your symptoms.
- Do the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale or CBT Model of Depression and bring it to the appointment. Either of these is helpful because they list your symptoms.
- List any recent stressful events or major changes in your life so you remember to tell your doctor about them. Tell him or her if you are experiencing violence or abuse in your relationship. Also tell him or her about any family history of mental health or substance use problems.
- Write your questions down and take them with you to the appointment.
- Take a pen and some paper to the appointment so that you can write down anything that you want to remember. Your support person could take these notes for you during the appointment.
- Have a support person take care of your child so that you can focus on your visit

AT THE APPOINTMENT:

- Tell your doctor what you are thinking, feeling, and doing. She or he needs to know so you get the right treatment and best care.
- Give your doctor the list of symptoms you wrote. Give him or her the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale or the CBT Model of Depression that you filled out.



- Talk about different ways of managing and treating your symptoms. Remember that depression can be treated. Treatment may include talk therapies, medications or both. Make sure you understand what is positive and what is negative about each option. Even if talk therapies are not easily available in your community they should be mentioned as an option for treatment.
- Ask questions. Write your questions down as you think of them so you can ask them before you leave.
- Be sure you and your doctor agree on a treatment plan you can live with. This may not be the final plan but you should have some options to think about until your next appointment.
- Write the answers to your questions or important points that you may want to think about later. These points may be what to do, or how often to do it. Your support person could help you by taking these notes.
- Repeat the treatment steps back to your doctor. This helps make sure that the plan is clear to both of you.
- Ask about other resources available in your community. These may be community programs, childcare subsidies, or postpartum depression support groups.
- If all of your questions were not been answered in this appointment, book another appointment right away. This helps you get all the information you need as soon as possible.

AFTER THE APPOINTMENT:

- Follow through on the steps you have agreed upon as your treatment plan.
- If you feel the plan is not working talk with a trusted friend.
- Make another appointment so that you can talk to your doctor about how you have been doing and if the treatment has been helpful.

www.heretohelp.bc.ca has a toolkit you can use to go over your symptoms. It also answers questions about talking to your doctor. It is information from BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions Information or BCPMHAI.

Source: Adapted from Bayer Institute P.R.E.P.A.R.E Patient Education Program and the Anxiety Disorders Toolkit.