

Fact sheet

1

Make the Most of Your Visit to the Doctor

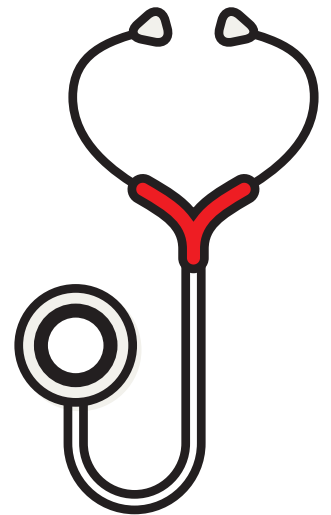
When you visit any health provider, remember they are there to advise you about your condition so that you can make an informed choice. As a patient you have the right to:

- Ask questions about your treatment.
- Be informed about details of your care, e.g. costs.
- Be informed about treatment options.
- Get a second medical opinion. Doctors expect and understand, and in some instances advise their patients to seek a second opinion.

Don't worry about hurting the doctor's feelings if you ask for one.

- Get information from other sources about your condition and its treatment.

For more information see *Informed Consent for Medical Tests* and *Using the Internet to Research Health Information* fact sheets. To make the most of your visit, we offer the following suggestions.



What can I do before the visit?

In many instances your time with your doctor may be limited, and as such it is helpful to prepare for the visit in advance. This may include:

- Make a list of your questions so you don't forget anything. Add to the list any symptoms, concerns or changes in your life since your last visit. Rank your questions in order of importance in case you run out of time.
- Know the name and dosage of all your medications including 'over the counter' drugs. Consider taking a list of your medications to your doctor or take all the bottles and packets with you if that is easier (read about making a health diary later in this fact sheet).
- If you need repeat prescriptions, make a note to ask for them.
- Giving a written record of your major, past medical and surgical events to the doctor on your first visit is an excellent idea. Knowing about your family's medical history is also helpful.
- If you don't know a lot about your condition, try to get some written information. This will help you understand and become familiar with the medical terms so that it's easier to discuss concerns with your doctor.
- It is not uncommon during the first few office visits to your doctor to be overwhelmed and to forget much of what is said. You might consider bringing a family member or loved one to your first few visits. Having another person there to ask questions and to review the information with you afterwards can be extremely helpful.
- If you have a chronic illness, consider keeping a written record of your contact with health professionals.

What can I do during the visit?

- Tell the doctor you have some questions.
- Write down the answers — don't trust your memory. Most people remember less than half the information they are given. You may wish to ask your family member to record the information that is being discussed.
- Tell the doctor if you are getting advice or treatment from another health professional including complementary therapies, vitamin supplements or herbal treatments.
- Your doctor should give a clear explanation of your condition, planned treatment, choice of available procedures and a list of possible side effects.
- Ask the doctor to write names of the drugs you must take and details of any treatments.
- If you think you may not be able to follow any instructions tell the doctor immediately to avoid problems later.
- Before leaving, make sure you have a clear idea of your treatment plan.
- Ask for any written information that may help you understand your condition.

What can I do after the visit?

- Don't be afraid to call the doctor between visits with any concerns.
- Make a list of the advice from the doctor and keep it visible, e.g. on fridge.
- Trust and respect is important in a doctor-patient relationship. If you don't feel comfortable with your doctor it may be worth getting another opinion. Different people are suited to different doctors so find someone you can relate to.
- Follow the doctors' suggestions to the best of your ability.
- Remember, you are responsible for your well being.

What questions can I ask the doctor?

Good communication is important and asking questions can make your visit more useful. Remember that writing down questions and making notes about answers can be helpful when reviewing information after your visit. These are sample questions you can ask to get a better understanding of your problem.

- Can you describe my condition in simple language?
- How will this condition affect me in the future?
- How serious is this condition?
- What sorts of tests will be needed?
- How good are the tests for diagnosing the problem and the conditions?
- What is the likely course of this condition?
- Will I need regular check-ups?
- What sort of treatment will be needed?
- Why do I need this test, treatment, surgery or procedure?
- When will I need to start treatment?
- What are the benefits of this type of treatment?
- Are there any risks to this treatment?
- What is success or failure rate of this treatment?
- Are there any immediate side-effects to this treatment?
- Does this treatment cause any other long-term changes either physical, social, emotional, mental or sexual?
- Are there any other treatment choices?
- What might happen if I don't have this treatment?
- What happens if I choose to have no treatment?
- How long will I have to undergo treatment?
- What should I expect after treatment?
- When do I need to decide about my treatment?
- How much is this treatment going to cost?
- Would complementary therapies help my health?
- Is there a dietitian on staff if I have nutritional concerns or difficulties?
- Are there other health professionals that I need to see?
- Do I need to change my lifestyle, e.g. diet, exercise, weight?
- Do you have any information that I can take with me?
- Where can I get written information about my illness?

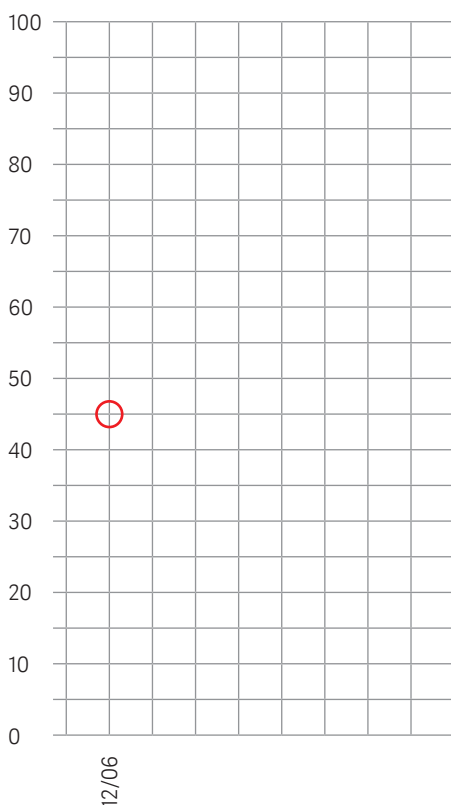
What about alternative and complementary therapies?

Complementary therapies include a wide range of healing approaches. They may have a supportive approach that can improve well-being and quality of life for people with chronic conditions or terminal illness. These therapies may include meditation, massage, visualisation, aromatherapy, acupuncture or herbs to name a few. Some health professionals see these therapies as useful. However many of them have not been tested in clinical trials in relation to kidney disease.

Herbal treatments sometimes claim that they may cure or slow down the disease progression but some are harmful to people with kidney disease. Again, few clinical trials have been undertaken to prove claims although this is slowly changing. Always speak with the health care team managing your condition before using any herbal remedies, over-the-counter medicines or supplements. It is important to let your health care team know you are using complementary or herbal therapies.

How to manage your health

My eGFR Results



Many people with a chronic disease become 'experts' as they have to learn a set of life skills to cope with and manage their life. Managing your own health can improve the quality of your physical and mental health, and decrease your reliance on others.

To maintain your health it is important to self-manage your condition. A health action plan is an excellent way to ensure that you stay in good health, and also achieve your lifestyle goals.

Buy a folder and keep records of your health appointments, test results and medications. This way you will be able to follow the developments of your blood pressure, blood tests and urine tests yourself. You may also like to use some graph paper to plot your test results (see example).

Also buy a journal or exercise book and start keeping your own health diary. Write down your health goals, and spend two to three minutes every day thinking about how to achieve these goals.

Take your health diary with you whenever you visit your health professional so you can record the information while it is fresh in your mind.

Some medications and medical procedures are not recommended if you have kidney disease. It is important that you tell health professionals that you have kidney disease — do not assume that they already know.

For more information about kidney or urinary health, please contact our free call Kidney Health Information Service (KHIS) on 1800 454 363.

Or visit our website kidney.org.au to access free health literature.

This is intended as a general introduction to this topic and is not meant to substitute for your doctor's or Health Professional's advice. All care is taken to ensure that the information is relevant to the reader and applicable to each state in Australia. It should be noted that Kidney Health Australia recognises that each person's experience is individual and that variations do occur in treatment and management due to personal circumstances, the health professional and the state one lives in. Should you require further information always consult your doctor or health professional.



If you have a **hearing or speech impairment**, contact the National Relay Service on **1800 555 677** or **relayservice.com.au**

For all types of services ask for 1800 454 363