



CALIFORNIA'S  
VALUED TRUST

Healthcare Benefits for the Education Community

This document is part of California's Valued Trust (CVT) educational series

**Be Informed. Be Involved.**

*Know your health care choices.*

This educational series is a resource to help you get good quality health care. For more resources, visit our Web site at [www.cvtrust.org/resources/beinformedbeinvolved](http://www.cvtrust.org/resources/beinformedbeinvolved).

**1** Come prepared – bring and share a list of the questions you want to ask, medications you take, etc.

Before you leave for your appointment, take a moment to review the things you want to say during the visit and the questions you want to ask. You can go over these things in your mind, or better yet, **write them down in a list and take it with you to your visit.**

- Taking written lists to your visit makes it easy for you to tell the nurses, doctors, and other health professionals the things they need to know about your symptoms, medications, and other health issues.
- Giving your health care providers a written list of questions helps make sure that they will give you the answers you need – even if you are feeling rushed or unsure of what you are asking.



For help in making lists to take with you to an appointment, visit CVT's Web site [www.cvtrust.org/resources/beinformedbeinvolved](http://www.cvtrust.org/resources/beinformedbeinvolved) for this resource: "Tips on what to do *before* your health care appointment."

**2** Ask questions – and if you don't understand the answers, ask again

Asking questions is one of the best ways to help make sure that you are getting quality care. Below are some suggestions about asking questions during your visit.

- **Ask the questions on your written list.** Go over the written list of questions that you brought with you to the visit to make sure you don't miss any of them.
- **Speak up whenever you are confused or have concerns about what is said.**
  - If a nurse, doctor, or other health professional says something that's unclear or confusing, you need to let them know right away. If you have to, don't hesitate to interrupt by saying *"Excuse me, I didn't understand what you just said—would you please tell me again?"*
  - If you aren't happy with the treatment the doctor recommends, or you have other concerns, you need to let the doctor know. You can say that you have a concern. You can ask whether there might be another treatment to consider.
- **If you don't understand an answer, ask again!** If the nurse or doctor answers your question and you *still* don't understand, you need to say so.
  - Don't be embarrassed to ask the same question again. Remember, it's your body and you need to be sure you understand.
  - You can say, *"I'm sorry but I still don't understand. Would you try saying that again in a different way?"*
- **Ask questions about medications and other treatments.**
  - Ask why you need to take the medicine and what it is supposed to do.
  - Be sure you understand exactly how to take the medicine (when, how much, and for how long).
  - For safety, ask about possible "side effects" that the medicine might cause. Ask whether there are any symptoms or problems you should be watching for and what to do if you notice them.
- **If any questions come up after you leave the office, call back and ask.**
- **For help in asking questions, use resources.**



For help in asking questions during your health care appointment, visit the website called “**Questions are the answer**” ([www.ahrq.gov/questionsaretheanswer/](http://www.ahrq.gov/questionsaretheanswer/)). It is run by the federal Agency for Health Care Research and Quality.

- It includes checklists of questions to ask in different situations, such as when you get a new prescription or when you are having tests or surgery.
- You can even customize and print your own list of questions to take with you to a medical visit.

### **3 To double check on how well you’ve understood, repeat what you’ve heard using your own words**

It’s important to be sure you understand what is said about your health and what you need to do. You might be given a lot of new information during your visit and there may be technical terms that are unfamiliar to you. It’s hard to absorb new information in a short period of time.

Whether you are feeling confused or not, it’s wise to make a habit of checking on how well you understand what is said during your medical visit. After your doctor or nurse tells you something, repeat the main points back in your own words. If you have misunderstood something, then the doctor or nurse will know right away, and they can give you more explanation. It’s always better to double check than to assume you understood and then find out later you were wrong.

### **4 Take notes to help remember what was said and what you need to do**

Taking notes during your visit is a good way to make sure that you remember what the doctor or other health professional said when you get home. Notes are good reminders about the instructions you need to follow and the symptoms you need to watch for.

If you bring a friend or family member with you to your appointment, you can ask them to take notes for you. Later, after your visit is over, you can talk with them about what was said and what you need to do.

If you are given a brochure or pamphlet during your visit, go over it carefully when you get home. If any questions come up when you read it, call your health professional’s office.



CVT's Web site [www.cvtrust.org/resources/beinformedbeinvolved](http://www.cvtrust.org/resources/beinformedbeinvolved) has many other tip sheets to help you get good quality care, including the following:

- "Tips on what to do *before* your health care appointment."
- "Tips for following through on treatment and managing your health."

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Source: These materials were adapted from the *Communication Toolkit: Using information to get high quality care*. The American Institutes for Research developed the Toolkit materials with funding from the California HealthCare Foundation. The National Business Group on Health maintains and host the Toolkit website.