7 tips for being your own best advocate

Let's be real – not all of us feel comfortable going to the doctor. But if we want to live our best lives and stay on top of our health – including our breast health – it's necessary.

Fortunately, there are ways to feel more comfortable and be your own best advocate. Try these tips with your doctor to make sure you get the care you deserve. (Don't have a doctor? Here's information about getting one.)

1. Trust what you know.

No one knows more about your body than you do. Not your partner, not your family, not even your doctor. So when you talk with medical professionals about your health, remember that you have important information they can use. You know about changes in your body and about any problems you are having. You know what your breasts normally look and feel like. Trust your own experience and talk honestly about it with your doctor.

2. Get familiar with your insurance.

If you have health insurance, take some time to learn about your plan. You don't have to memorize every detail, but it might be good to confirm that annual check-ups and screening tests will be covered. (They should be.) You'll also feel more comfortable if you know how to find out if something you need is covered. Most insurance companies have both a website you can log into and a phone number you can call for information. Here's more about what to do if you don't have health insurance and how to make the most of your plan if you do.

3. Be prepared.

Preparing before an appointment can help you feel calm and make the most of your time. Be ready to provide background about your family's health history, your lifestyle (exercise, diet, alcohol intake, etc.), and any medications you take. If possible, have the dates of your first and your most recent periods in mind. If you've started having mammograms, have the date and location of your last one handy. Gather information about any health concerns and bring printouts or notes as needed. Think ahead of time about what questions you have for your doctor.

4. Ask questions.

When your doctor comes in, ask if you can take a few minutes to briefly explain your situation and ask questions. Preparing a list of questions to bring to the appointment can help you remember everything you want to ask and keep the discussion focused on the issues that are most

important to you. If a goal of the visit is to make sure you're on top of your breast health, include specific questions about that.How often should I get a mammogram? Am I at a higher risk of breast cancer? Susan G. Komen has a whole list of questions to get you started.

5. Take notes.

It is a good idea to take notes about what your doctor tells you during your visit, or even record the conversation for future reference. Talking through what you heard later with your partner or a close friend can also help you process and remember everything. You can even bring a family member or a close friend to your appointment for support and a second pair of ears.

6. Give feedback.

If your doctor's explanations and responses are helpful, say so. This kind of feedback will encourage your doctor to talk with you, listen to you, and continue to help you. If you need more information or didn't understand something, share that too. Give your doctor the chance to clarify and make sure you're both on the same page.

7. Remember why you're there.

This is your life and your body. If you need time to process information, ask for it. If you want a second opinion, get one. Doctors are just like anyone else—they want to do their jobs well. That means doing whatever they can to help you get better. Make sure your doctor knows what you are going through. If at any point you feel uncomfortable, communicate that to your doctor as well. And if you don't feel heard or respected by your doctor, look for a different one.

Ultimately, it's your doctor's job to guide and support you. You can make their job easier by asking for what you need and being open and honest. Your health is worth it!