

How to Get the **BEST** Treatment from Your Clinician

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Getting excellent advice and health care from your clinician (doctors or nurse practitioners) is a bit like using a computer: garbage in, garbage out. If you don't put in the correct information, what you get back is mediocre at best, unusable at worst. Clinicians are highly trained, but they have two primary tools for individually tailoring treatment: their objective examination and the information you or your partner give them describing how you actually feel and function. If you give them good, thorough, relevant information, you will help them treat you appropriately.

So, how do you do this? It's really quite simple. Before you call or go to an appointment with your clinician, *be prepared* with clear answers to the following questions:

- **What is the specific problem?** Is it pain, balance, worsened symptoms, medication problems?
- **When did the problem start?** Be as specific as possible. Remember the date it started and the time of the day it occurs.
- **Is it constant or intermittent?** If intermittent, do you notice any pattern? For example, is it connected to when you take medications or a specific event or a certain time of the day?
- **Where is the problem?** Left hand? Right foot? Again, try to be as specific as possible.
- **What happens during these episodes?** For example, describe a typical incident: "My right hand tremor worsens and it becomes jerky, and my right foot starts to jerk, too."
- **What makes the problem better?** What makes it worse? Bring information on any treatments or positions or medications you have tried that either help or don't.
- **On a scale of 0-10, with 10 being the worst, how would you rate the severity of the problem and why?** "It's about a 5, moderately disabling physically, but it's an 8 because it is so distressing emotionally." You may want to assign a number based on how much it bothers you and affects your quality of life as well.
- **What are your current medications?** Be ready with a full list of your medications, how much you take of each, what dosage, when and what times of the day or how often, and what you take each one for. Also, be prepared to list any allergies or medications you've tried that didn't work for you and why. Always carry a list of all your medications with this information with you, especially to your appointments.
- **Have you had any recent incidents (infection, illness, surgery, falls, lifestyle changes, etc.)?** This may not seem connected to you; however, infections, changes in environment, stress, new medications, or pain all can cause a worsening of symptoms for Parkinson's patients.

Your answers should be brief and to the point (your clinician will love you for this and readily return your calls because he or she knows you will be prepared with the information that's really needed). If you have more than one issue, prioritize them in case you or the clinician runs out of time and find out whom (probably his or her nurse) you can call to get what you need.

Finally, when you see your clinician, don't be afraid to do the following:

- **Ask questions.** Write them down before you come in or call.
- Bring someone with you to **take notes**.
- **Ask for referrals** to other clinicians for consultations if desired.
- Remember to **request periodically – or when a change occurs – to have a referral to physical, occupational, and/or speech therapists** for individualized evaluation and treatment plans.

Healthcare providers are here to work with you to maximize your quality life, but it is truly a team effort. You and your partner are the team leaders!