



11 Questions

A Caregiver Should Ask Their Loved One's Doctor

Taking care of a loved one can be both challenging and rewarding. Due to the seriousness of the role, many caregivers are unsure of exactly what they need to do which leads to questions about how to be the best caregiver possible. We've created a list of commonly asked questions that we hope will help you navigate your loved one's care as well as understand the resources that are available to you as the caregiver. Don't be shy about asking your loved one's doctor to answer these questions and others that may come to mind.



Questions Related to Your Loved One's Care

1. What do I need to know about the person I'm caring for diagnosis and treatment plan?

Your loved one may already have some health conditions you're familiar with, but you may not be aware of the specific treatment details or how the condition might progress if not properly treated. When you go to your doctor's office, ask them to explain the condition and what you need to know about caring for someone with it. What is the treatment plan? What medications are being used to treat it? Feel free to ask for a list of medications and doses.

Here are some other things you can learn at the doctor appointment:

- How and when to administer medications?
- What are some of the possible side effects of the medicines?
- What is the follow-up appointment schedule?
- Is there anything you should watch out for between visits that might require you to come in before your follow-up appointment?
- When would a specialist be needed for a particular condition?

2. I've noticed some changes in my loved one, should I be concerned?

For patients with chronic conditions or degenerative health conditions, new symptoms can appear. This can happen suddenly or gradually. Ask your loved one's doctor about what could be coming down the road. You can also find out which new symptoms require immediate attention and which can wait for the next doctor's appointment. Find out who to contact when the office is closed in case you notice a symptom that's considered urgent. Consider writing down this information on a notecard or keep a note on your phone to keep with you.

Questions Related to Your Loved One's Care

3. I Googled my loved one's condition and this is what it says. Is it accurate?

The internet is full of information about every disease. Sources such as WebMD and the Mayo Clinic offer reliable information about symptoms, causes, risk factors, and treatments for a seemingly infinite number of health conditions. However... there can be a lot of causes for a particular symptom that may be different from what you Googled. While the information you read may be accurate, it might not apply to your loved one.

For example, your loved one could experience an earache. You Google "earache causes," and read the information presented. There are a lot of different causes for this condition and your search results may or may not be related to the actual cause of the pain. That's why it's best to have an exam by the doctor

to determine the cause of the pain or other symptom. And they can help you determine if it's related to another health condition or if it's something new that needs to be addressed.



4. How will you coordinate with my loved one's other healthcare providers?

It's not uncommon to have a primary care provider as well as other specialists caring for your loved one. Heart conditions, cancer, prostate-related conditions,

or gynecologic issues will require other physicians to be a part of the care team.

Ask how the team will coordinate your loved one's care and keep you in the loop.

For example, some healthcare facilities feature apps to contact care team members if you have questions or need to refill prescriptions. Health facility apps can also include post-appointment notes so you can access any information you need.

5. Should I have legal documents signed by my loved one so that I can continue to serve as their advocate?

There are some documents that the doctor's office will usually keep on file to be sure you have access to your loved one's medical information. There is also documentation that will allow you to make decisions on their behalf. Your loved one may also need to sign some of the documentation so that you can have the appropriate access.

Talk to your loved one's doctor about what is needed for their office to give you access. It's also important to remember that you'll have to repeat this at each of your loved one's doctors' offices.

6. How will I know when it's time to look into hospice care?

Not everyone will need hospice care, also referred to as end-of-life care. Talk to the doctor about whether your loved one is still in a curative treatment plan. This means that there are treatments available that are working, or likely to work, to cure a condition. It's also up to your loved one as to whether they wish to continue on a curative treatment plan.

In some cases, there are no more options for curing a condition. At this point it is important for your loved one and the doctor to discuss other options including palliative care, advanced care planning, and hospice to help your loved one stay comfortable.

Advance care planning will allow you to discuss the course of the chronic condition of your loved one, especially if in the advanced stages and the options to consider and consent for emergent services like cardiac and pulmonary resuscitation. These may be simply be called "Do not resuscitate" or "DNR" orders.

If you are aware of your loved ones' stage of illness or disease, discuss the course of the disease with the provider at the next appointment. Advanced stages of certain diseases could often result in need for frequent hospital visits, and your loved one may choose to avoid them if they want to be kept comfortable.

Questions to Ask the Doctor About Your Role as a Caregiver

7. Can you give me some idea of what I should expect as a caregiver for someone with my loved one's condition(s)?

Just like every patient is different, so are the requirements of every caregiver. Based on your loved one's health conditions there may be different nutritional needs, physical therapy requirements, and other activities that you'll need to manage. Talking to your loved one's doctor about what those might be can help you prepare mentally, and if your loved one's home needs adjustments you can also begin preparations.

There may also be other needs you can prepare for such as how to find non-emergency medical transportation to various appointments. Your loved one's doctor may be able to provide contact information for medical transportation services, or even schedule rides to the office. You might not have considered that your loved one may need an EMT-certified driver versus you doing it by yourself or using a rideshare app like Uber and Lyft to get to doctor appointments.

Your loved one's doctor should feel like a partner in providing the best quality care. You can also talk to your own physician about ways you can take care of yourself. They may even tell you ways to take care of yourself, because it can be easy to forget your own needs when you're so focused on someone else's.

8. Are there resources that can help me be a better caregiver?

Being a caregiver can sometimes feel lonely. It's important to know you're not alone and that there are others with similar experiences. Your loved one's provider may recommend resources such as caregiver support groups and online forums that can give you encouragement and ideas about what works well for their families that you might also try. These groups are also a good resource for simply listening and understanding all that you're going through. With this type of help, you'll be reinvigorated to take better care of your loved one.

Ask your provider if there are special resources offered by the health plan such as a Social worker team, case management team, or in-home care provider to assist with the care of your loved one.

Questions to Ask the Doctor About Your Role as a Caregiver

9. How do I learn the skills needed as a caregiver?

In addition to understanding your loved one's diagnoses and treatment plan, there are some tasks you'll need to perform while at home, without the help of a medical professional at your side. This can range from giving the right medications on a schedule to more physical activities such as helping your loved one take a shower or bath safely. If you're not a healthcare provider, this may not be something you know how to do.

Talk to your loved one's doctor and the nursing team about tips and tricks that will help you gain confidence in the specific tasks you're faced with. Don't be shy about asking. It's completely understandable that you would find some of these things challenging. Some tasks may be dangerous to perform on your own and you may need to find outside assistance such as home health care services. Your loved one's doctor can also assist with finding the right in-home service providers.



10. I'm exhausted. Is there any help available that will give me a break?

Caring for a loved one 24/7 becomes exhausting on top of taking care of your own daily activities. Sometimes you need to take a break, and that's OK. "Respite care" is when your loved one stays at a hospital or other care facility so you can get some much-needed rest. It may give you peace of mind to know that the person you're caring for is staying at a facility with qualified professionals helping them.

Your loved one's health insurance provider and doctor can point you in the right direction for finding respite care services if available.

Questions to Ask the Doctor About Your Role as a Caregiver

11. What should I do when I am not sure if my loved one is experiencing an emergency condition?

If the condition is not life threatening, your primary care doctor is the main point of contact for all your loved ones' health care needs. At your loved ones' next appointment, ask how to contact the doctor during afterhours or weekends, and if there is an urgent care facility that the doctor recommends to call in case they are not accessible. Your doctor may have extended clinic hours during evenings and weekends, and can be used instead of seeking care at urgent care or emergency rooms.



Find Medicare Caregiver Resources

As a caregiver, you've got a lot on your plate. Use this list of questions a caregiver should ask their loved one's doctor can be a valuable source of information if you ask the right questions.

Another valuable resource is your loved one's health insurance plan. If you have durable power of attorney, you can make Medicare decisions for your loved one.

We do not offer every plan available in your area. Any information we provide is limited to those plans we do offer in your area. Please contact [Medicare.gov](https://www.medicare.gov) or 1-800-MEDICARE to get information on all of your options.