

7

How can you improve your time with the doctor?



Sometimes, we can leave the doctor's clinic with more questions than when we arrived. But there are ways to prepare for your appointments so you can get the most out of them.

Show up on time

HIV specialist and GP clinics can be very busy and being late can disrupt their schedules for the whole day. Yes, it can be frustrating to arrive on time and then have to wait. So, call the

doctor's office beforehand to see if they're running on time. And always let them know if you're running late.

Prepare for the appointment

Keep a list of things that have happened since your last appointment. Take the list with you and share it with your doctor. Include:

- Prescriptions – add to your list when the final repeat is getting close.
- The co-payment waiver form (if you live in NSW). A new form is needed every 12 months if you get your HIV meds from a community pharmacy.
- New health problems or symptoms. These could include:
 - not sleeping well
 - trouble concentrating or headaches
 - gut problems
 - emotional or mental health issues

- New or increasing side effects
- Missed doses of HIV treatment
- New medicines, supplements or alternative therapies
- Major changes in your life involving work, family, relationships and overseas travel plans
- Alcohol, tobacco, medicinal cannabis and/or recreational drug use.

You may not have time to fully discuss everything, so highlight the most important ones.

Bring information with you including packets of any medications or supplements you've started taking, or test results from another health care provider.

If you have a lot to discuss, book a longer appointment. If they haven't already, talk to your GP about creating a '**GP management plan**'. This will help them spend enough time to talk about all your health needs.

If you're having a hard time, tell your doctor. Perhaps a side effect that didn't bother you before is getting impossible

to deal with. It could be time to discuss changing your HIV treatment.

If the appointment is ending and you don't have the answers you came for, ask again.

Take notes during the appointment

There's usually a lot of information going back and forth during an appointment.

Take down notes during the appointment

- Ask for written material about medications, side effects, or any new health conditions
- Ask if there's a nurse or Peer Navigator to talk to about what happened during the appointment. If you see a counsellor or social worker, it's a good idea to make an appointment to see them after you see your doctor.
- Bring a friend with you. Let them know what you want to get out of the session. Give them a copy of your questions, so they can make sure they all get answered. Sit down together after the appointment to be sure you didn't miss anything.



If you need help finding an HIV doctor, ask your **local PLHIV organisation** for information on services in your area.

You can access a full list of trained HIV s100 prescribers [here](#).

If you would like to find a sexual health clinic, you can find a state-by-state list on the [Drama Downunder website](#).

For information on Aboriginal Medical Services, visit the [Better to Know website](#).

Remember, some clinics are free, and some are not. Make sure you ask about any costs involved when you make an appointment.

MEDICATIONS:

If you get prescribed a new drug, leave with information on exactly how to take it.

Know if any side effects are likely and how long they might last. Are there things you can do to deal with them? When should you call back?



TESTS:

If your doctor orders some tests, make sure you understand what they are for. Is there a better time of day to take them? Do you need to fast beforehand? When the tests come back, make sure you understand what the results mean.

