



# Optimizing Appointments with Doctors and Alzheimer's Specialists For Your Loved One

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## Optimizing Appointments

Regularly scheduled medical appointments are an extremely important component of any Alzheimer's patient's treatment plan. Consistent medical care is necessary in order to address a wide range of health and/or behavioral issues. If you are the main caregiver to a family member who suffers from Alzheimer's disease, you likely have many questions to ask their doctor plus limited time to do so when at an appointment. Use the following tips to optimize the time spent at your loved one's doctor's visits.

### 1. Be smart when scheduling appointment times

Always schedule appointments around your loved one's best time during the course of the day as well as during times when the doctor's office is not as crowded, if possible. Remember to bring snacks, water and an activity that your loved one enjoys doing. This will help to pass the time and relieve the stress of waiting.

### 2. Go to all appointments well prepared

Make a list of all the issues you would like to discuss with the doctor (e.g. side effects of medication, aggressive behavior, etc.). Bring along a list (or the labeled bottles) of all prescription and OTC medications that your loved one takes. If your family member lives in a long term care facility, also talk about any issues that staff members may be concerned about.

### 3. Be as specific as possible

Be prepared to answer any questions the doctor has concerning your loved one's various symptoms and/or behaviors. As Alzheimer's progresses, your input may be a crucial factor in determining ongoing care.

Some examples of questions you may be asked by the doctor include:

- Have you noticed any changes in your loved one's memory, mood and overall health? When did you and/or any other caregivers notice these changes?
- Is he or she capable of eating regular, healthy meals?
- Does he or she appear to be uncomfortable in any way?
- Has your family member exhibited any kind of aggressive behavior?
- Are you worried about his or her ability to drive or live alone?

### 4. Take lots of notes

Bring along a pen and pad to quickly write down all important information that the doctor gives you. You could

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also consider recording the discussion so that you can listen to it again at home, if this is permitted. In addition, you could bring another family member with you to be an extra set of ears and eyes. Always ask for clarification if you do not understand something the doctor says.

### **5. Think about your family member's future**

Ask the doctor to tell you what to expect within the next couple of years since knowing this will assist you in making any necessary preparations. You might want to consider asking the doctor about issues such as:

- nursing home placement
- long term care
- advance directives
- palliative care
- hospice care

### **6. Ask for recommendations and/or referrals**

A family doctor or an Alzheimer's disease specialist can provide you with excellent recommendations and referrals to different community resources. These resources may include:

- local geriatric agencies
- senior centers
- meal services
- respite care
- Alzheimer's support groups

### **7. Deal with any conflicts as quickly as possible**

Address any issues you may have with a doctor and other members of his or her staff as opposed to immediately switching to another doctor. It is important to remember that even small changes can be very confusing to your family member as well as negatively impact his or her long term physical and/or mental health.

The following link is a suggested Alzheimer's medical appointment checklist provided by the Mayo Clinic: <http://www.mayoclinic.org/documents/medical-appointment-checklist/doc-20088715>