

Alzheimer's Care: 10 Tips for Preparing for Medical Appointments

Caring for someone with Alzheimer's disease requires careful planning and consideration, especially when it comes to medical appointments. Here are 10 tips to help you prepare for a doctor's visit as a caregiver for a person living with Alzheimer's:

1. Create a Medical Information Folder or Binder:

- Organize important medical information, including a list of medications, medical history, and any allergies.
- Organize all of your After Visit Summaries by provider/ specialist(s) seen – you can keep these as far back as a year; then move them over to a binder and keep them in a safe place in case you ever need them again.
- Keep a front section with abbreviated notes about all medical encounters in chronological order.
- Separate each section with a tab so you can find information easily.
- This binder can be easily taken to each doctor's appointment.

2. Maintain a Daily Journal:

- Important information to track daily includes taking all medications (or reasons why this has been challenging); daily or weekly weights with dates taken (along with other vital signs – blood pressure, blood sugar); meal intake percentages; sleeping patterns; physical activity patterns; and a daily/ weekly log of the person's behavior, symptoms, and any changes in their condition.
- Keep a list of questions to ask your provider and write them out as a list before a visit.
- Share this information with the doctor to help them better understand the individual's health.

3. Schedule Appointments at the Right Time:

- Choose appointment times when the person with Alzheimer's is usually more alert and less agitated.
- Avoid scheduling appointments during times when they typically experience sundowning (increased confusion and agitation in the late afternoon and evening).

4. Bring a Companion or Record the Visit as a Memo on Your Phone:

- Have another family member or friend accompany you to the appointment.
- This person can provide support, take notes, and offer comfort to the individual with Alzheimer's.
- Another option is to record your visit so you can listen to it later to make sure you understood everything that was said.

5. Prepare a List of Questions:

- Before the appointment, write down any questions or concerns you have about the person's health.
- This ensures that you don't forget important details during the visit and helps you to make sure all of your questions were answered.

6. Be Ready for Behavioral Changes:

- Individuals with Alzheimer's may exhibit challenging behaviors during medical visits.
- If you sense a problem arising, stop and think through the C3P Problem-Solving Framework and see if you can identify the reason and fix it before the behavior becomes difficult to manage.
- Inform the doctor if you anticipate any specific issues and discuss strategies to address them.

7. Bring Comfort Items:

- Pack items that provide comfort to the person, such as a favorite blanket, a familiar book, a family photo, or a playlist of calming music.
- These items can help reduce anxiety and create a more relaxed environment.

8. Update Emergency Contact Information:

- Make sure the doctor's office has the right phone numbers for you and the person you're caring for in case of an emergency.
- Make sure the doctor's office has updated emergency contact information for both you and the person with Alzheimer's.
- Provide clear instructions on how to reach you in case of any issues.

9. Communicate Changes in Function:

- Report any changes in the person's cognitive or physical abilities since the last visit.
- Let the doctor know if the person can't do things they used to do.
- This helps the doctor understand how the disease is going, will be better able to guide you about what to do next, and make necessary adjustments to the care plan.

10. Plan for Follow-Up Care:

- Talk about what comes next, like when to come back or what tests are needed.
- Make sure you know what to do next to take care of the person if you were at that visit for a particular problem.
- Discuss and schedule any necessary follow-up appointments, tests, or referrals.
- Make sure you understand the next steps in the care plan and ask for written instructions if needed.

Remember, communication is key. Maintain an open and honest dialogue with the doctor, sharing both positive and challenging aspects of caregiving. This collaboration can lead to better care for the individual with Alzheimer's.