

## **10 Tips for Communicating Effectively with Your Health Care Provider About Fibromyalgia**

We've all been there: Sitting on a paper-covered examination table, waiting for half an hour to have a five-minute conversation, leaving with more questions than answers. Doctor visits can be frustrating, but with the right preparation, you can get much more from your experience. Follow these tips to make the most of each visit:

### ***Before your appointment:***

**TIP 1:** Keep a daily health care log, tracking work and leisure activities, sleep patterns, and diet, in addition to pain symptoms. You may spot patterns that help your health care provider diagnose and manage your chronic widespread pain and tenderness.

**TIP 2:** Along with your health care log, prepare a list of concerns to discuss, plus printouts of any research you've done. Keep it reasonable; your doctor won't have time to read reams of paper.

**TIP 3:** Make sure your appointment is scheduled for enough time to include some in-depth conversation. If you're not sure, call ahead and ask for additional time. Even a few extra minutes can make a big difference.

### ***During your appointment:***

**TIP 4:** Arrive prepared for a partnership. Your health care provider has your best interests at heart; an assertive but respectful attitude is a great starting point for your relationship.

**TIP 5:** Keep your health care log and list of concerns handy so you don't forget anything, and take plenty of notes during your visit. Be as specific as possible when describing your pain and other symptoms. If you're nervous, bring a friend or family member to act as your advocate and take notes for you.

**TIP 6:** As you're ending the appointment, reiterate key points and reconfirm the next steps each of you will take. If needed, establish a follow-up plan with specific actions. (For example: You will start a treatment plan on Monday, and your health care provider will email you physical therapist referrals before the weekend.)

### ***After your appointment:***

**TIP 7:** Your relationship doesn't end when you leave the office. Don't be shy about following up with concerns. Many health care providers today use email to communicate with patients, but use discretion; daily updates are inappropriate, but checking in if your symptoms worsen is smart.

**TIP 8:** Follow the action plan you created with your health care provider, and keep taking thorough notes in your health care log so you can discuss patterns at upcoming appointments.

**TIP 9:** The connection you create with your doctor is personal and valuable. Just as in any relationship, ask for what you need, and exercise a little patience. It may take time to build trust. If you try your best and still don't get what you need, move on; it's worth the effort to find the health care provider who's the best fit for you.

**TIP 10:** Remember, good communication with your health care provider will keep your relationship strong and ensure you get the best care possible. By staying in touch and sharing information and resources, you'll build a solid connection that will serve you well for years to come.

For more information, visit [www.HealthyWomen.org/explainyourpain](http://www.HealthyWomen.org/explainyourpain) or [www.Fibrocenter.com](http://www.Fibrocenter.com).

These tips were developed in collaboration with Pfizer Inc.