Preparing for a Medical Appointment

BEFORE THE APPOINTMENT

» Schedule the appointment at a time that works well for everyone involved.

» Fill out the Medical Appointment Worksheet on page 62.

» The medical team will be better able to care for the person with Parkinson’s if you are prepared for the appointment. Think about (and write down) specific concerns you want to discuss with the doctor:
  – Bothersome motor symptoms, such as tremor, slowness, stiffness, balance/falls
  – Bothersome non-motor symptoms, such as mood, thinking changes, dizziness, sleep, constipation or pain

» List any medical changes since the last appointment. Was there a hospitalization or emergency room visit? Was there a surgery or procedure?

» If your loved one has had deep brain stimulation (DBS) surgery for Parkinson’s, is programming or a battery analysis needed? This may require a separate appointment with a DBS programmer.

» If your loved one has had changes in walking, ability to complete day-to-day cares and activities, voice volume or swallowing, an appointment with a rehab therapist (physical, occupational or speech therapist) may be needed.
  – If your clinic has rehab therapists on-site, call the doctor’s office to see if a therapy appointment can be made for the same day as the medical appointment.
  – If there is no rehab therapist on-site, you will need a referral for insurance coverage. Add this to your list of topics to bring up with the doctor.

» Do you have questions about which exercise program is right for the person with Parkinson’s? Ask for a referral to a physical therapist who can tailor an exercise program for the person with Parkinson’s.

» Note any changes to the living situation.

» Check prescription bottles for needed refills.
THE DAY BEFORE AND DAY OF THE APPOINTMENT

» Assemble the following items to bring to the appointment:
  – Current medication list; include all prescription and over-the-counter medications and supplements (including strengths and doses)
  – Insurance cards and ID
  – Pill box (so medications can be given while away from home)

» If you want a letter from the visit to go to your loved one’s primary doctor, bring the name and address of the doctor and clinic.

» Plan to attend the appointment with your loved one. It is helpful to have another person present to share observations, hear and understand the information discussed and take notes.

» Get to the appointment on time, even early. Make sure there is enough time to visit the restroom before the appointment.

DURING THE APPOINTMENT

» Write notes and answers to questions.

» Be honest when answering questions, even if the answers are difficult.

» Understand the recommendations and follow-up plans before you leave. If something is unclear, ask the doctor for clarification.

» Make sure you get information about any new medications that are prescribed:
  – What is the name of the medication?
  – What is the medication being prescribed for? Is it to replace another medication or to be taken in addition to other medications?
  – What is the dose, and how often is it to be taken? (Many anti-Parkinson medications are increased gradually to avoid side effects. Make sure you write down the dosing schedule precisely.)
  – When and how will you know if the medicine is working?
  – Are there common or serious side effects to watch for?

» Understand who you should call with questions, concerns or updates.

» Try to schedule the next appointment or additional team appointments before leaving the office.