



## Joe's Tips – Module 4: Getting the Most from Your Health Care Visit

- 1. Before going to the doctor, write down everything you want to discuss during your appointment.** Make note of any changes in your health since your last visit and jot down any questions. If your visit is for a specific health problem, document any facts that might help your doctor evaluate the condition. Pay attention to details – they can help your doctor make a more accurate diagnosis. (See the Learn More section for a helpful checklist.)
- 2. Write down what your doctor tells you.** As you go through your notes with your doctor, write down what he or she tells you. That way, you'll be able to refer to the information later and make sure you don't forget anything important.
- 3. Ask your doctor to explain *all* your treatment options.** Often, there are a variety of treatment options available. Ask your doctor to explain the benefits and risks of each. The same holds true when your doctor prescribes medication – there may be a variety of drugs to treat your condition, ask about effectiveness, cost, side effects and potential interaction with other medications or supplements.
- 4. If you don't understand something your doctor is saying, ask for clarification.** Sometimes doctors use technical medical terms that are hard to understand. If you're not following everything your doctor is saying, ask him or her to put it in laymen's terms. Find out if your doctor has a brochure that explains your health condition in simple terms. He or she may also be able to recommend a web site or book with more information for patients.
- 5. Don't be afraid to “bother” your doctor.** Your health is important, and your doctor can't treat you appropriately without all the facts. Before the doctor leaves the room, make sure you've had a chance to cover everything in your notes. You may have waited days or weeks for an appointment, so make good use of the limited time you have with your doctor.
- 6. If you're dealing with a serious health problem, take a trusted family member or friend with you to your appointments.** Finding out you have a serious illness can be overwhelming. So much is at stake and there is a great deal of information to weigh regarding your treatment options. For that reason, you may wish to bring along a trusted, knowledgeable family member or friend to doctors' appointments who can serve as a “second set of ears” and provide emotional support. (Due to the HIPAA privacy rule, you may need to sign an authorization allowing someone else access to your protected health information, even if it's just hearing the doctor's oral comments.)