

# How To Be A HEALTH CARE ADVOCATE



Caregivers undoubtedly find themselves consumed with doctor visits. Perhaps even trips to the emergency room. If this is you, these settings can be overwhelming, but advocating for health is a critical skill. It won't only help you, but your family member or loved one as well.



## Why Advocating is Important

1. The healthcare provider knows that someone is holding them accountable.
2. Staying involved and asking questions gives you the information to make informed and responsible decisions.
3. The more you learn about health care conditions, the more prepared you are to seek alternative treatments and interventions.



## Characteristics of a Good Advocate

1. Have a list of questions and concerns before each appointment and take notes during the visit.
2. Be calm and measured. There's a time to become urgent and persistent, but only as a last resort.
3. Don't be afraid to ask the "stupid" questions. They may seem silly, but they aren't. You should feel satisfied at the end of any appointment that all your questions are answered.
4. Don't let health care time restraints keep you from getting the valuable information you need.
5. Ask who to call if you have additional questions or concerns—and always try to get a name with a direct phone number.



## Preparing for Healthcare Visits

1. Bring a list of medications. You should be asked for this list regardless, so it's best to have it ready.
2. Fully understand the purpose of the visit. Identify and take note of symptoms, and when they occurred or worsened.
3. Allow your family member or loved one to provide as much information as possible. Encourage the health care provider to speak directly to them.
4. Don't hesitate to provide clarity for uncertain conversations. Try this approach: "Do you mind if I add more information to what you've told the doctor?"
5. Request a solution or plan of action. Be sure to get doctor's orders if needed.
6. Ask about what to do if symptoms don't improve (or worsen), and keep a journal reviewing each visit and its outcome.



## Bottom Line

Don't feel overwhelmed. With time, you'll get more comfortable in health care settings. And the information you gather and keep track of will become invaluable for the person you're caring for. Remember, all these principles apply to your health care, too!

