

Your Health Matters

LET'S TALK ABOUT MEDICINES

Confused, Unsure, Unclear, Perplexed and Lost. Have you ever felt that way when you are finished talking with your physician about your medications or diagnosis?

Health care information and the health care system can be very confusing. Nine out of every 10 adults have problems understanding the instructions their doctor gives them – how to take their medication, how to care for a loved one after surgery, how to manage a chronic disease. “Health literacy” can be challenging even to people who are highly educated. When a person doesn’t fully understand health information, they are likely to have poorer health.

Here are some suggestions to improve your health literacy and your health.

Choose a primary care provider you are comfortable communicating with. You and your provider should become partners in your health care. **Share information** with him. He should know all about you, including your beliefs, your health concerns, and your medical history. He should be aware of any medications you are taking, and any complementary or alternative health practices you are using. Your provider needs to have a full picture of your health. Then, together you can make medical decisions that are based on his expertise and fit your values.

Prepare for each visit. Before you go to the doctor, think about what you want to discuss. Write down your symptoms. List any questions you have, putting the most important ones at the top of the list so you’ll be sure to ask them first. Take all your medications with you.

During your visit, **ask questions** about the medical tests your provider recommends, the diagnosis, and treatment instructions. Speak up if you have concerns. Ask the physician about other options. Make sure you completely understand your provider’s instructions by repeating them back, such as “What I’m hearing you say is that I need to . . .”

Sometimes it is helpful to **bring a family member or friend** with you on your visit. Tell them in advance what your objective is and the questions you want to ask. They can help by listening to the provider, taking notes, and reminding you of questions you wanted to ask.

Ask your provider to **write down instructions** for you, or provide you with printed material about your condition or diagnosis. You can review this material later at your own pace, or have a family member go over it with you.

Be an active participant in your own health care. Make sure you play your part by choosing your provider, partnering with the physician, preparing for visits, asking questions, and making sure you understand all the information your provider shares before you leave the office.

The Montgomery County Health Department loves taking care of your family, and works every day to protect, promote and improve health in our community. To learn more, call 573-564-2495 or visit us online at www.montgomerycountyhealth.org or on Facebook or Twitter @healthymoco. ■

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Linda Harman".

8.30.16