

A Health Campaign of Uniformed Services University, www.usuhs.edu, and the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress, Bethesda, Maryland, www.CSTSonline.org

STAYING THE COURSE: *Following Medical Recommendations for Health*

While we often look to our doctors and our healthcare system to take care of us, we have a most important role in this process. Our doctors may provide advice: starting a diet to lower our cholesterol and weight, getting a yearly mammogram, having a stress test, or taking a prescribed course of medication.

How many of us have stopped taking medication without consulting our doctor because we began to feel better? It may not have occurred to us that being on the medication

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is why we are feeling better, a sign that the medication is working. How many of us have stopped taking medication because of unpleasant side effects that we did not share with our doctor? In so doing, our doctor was not able to prescribe something else and we may

be compromising our health. How can we build a good and trusting relationship with our doctor that supports our health, and helps us stay the course? Here are some tips and advice for achieving both.

Prepare for Your Visit

- Write down your questions and symptoms in advance. Bring this list along with a pen or pencil to jot down answers and take notes.
- Provide your physician with a list of all your current medications including the strength and dosage.
- Bring a family member or friend to help you process the information and for support.
- If you need certain accommodations (e.g., language translation or large print paperwork), ask for them when you make your appointment.

Communicate Openly with Your Doctor

- Express your concerns and needs. Worry and concerns over side effects and sensitive topics, like sexual functioning and weight gain, are points your provider is ready to discuss.
- Ask for clarification. If you do not understand something, do not hesitate to ask again, or ask to have your doctor write it down.

Request a Treatment Suitable for Your Lifestyle

Think of anything that might present a barrier to following whatever is prescribed (e.g., need for additional medical screening, a health plan, or another medication).

- If you have trouble swallowing a pill, ask if it comes in liquid. If you tend to be forgetful or work in an environment not conducive to taking medication, ask if a medication comes in time-release capsule or less frequent dosing.
- Utilize your doctor's resources (e.g., nurse practitioners and case managers from your doctor's office who are available over the phone).

Reinforce Good Health Habits for your Entire Family

- Use your health behavior as an example to your children. Explain the importance of washing hands, covering one's mouth while coughing, eating foods to maintain healthy weight and nutrition, and, most of all, incorporating these behaviors into your daily routine.