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 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, friend or interpreter (if language or hearing is a problem) to help you process the information and for support.

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., does your doctor have a nurse practitioner or case manager who is readily available via telephone?).

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 the importance of incorporating these behaviors into your daily routine.
HELPING CHILDREN COPE DURING DEPLOYMENT

This fact sheet contains useful information for you — parents and family caregivers — to help children cope during a parent's deployment. This fact sheet was written by experts in military medicine and family trauma. Its purpose is to address commonly asked questions. It is important to remember that while deployments are stressful, they also provide opportunities for families to grow closer and stronger.

The best way to help children cope is to 1) reassure them that the deployed parent is trained to do his/her job; 2) explain to children that they, too, have a job as part of the family at home who supports our troops and our nation; and, 3) communicate in ways that children can understand according to their age (see sidebar on page 2: Communicating with Children during Deployment).

Commonly Asked Questions from Parents About Deployment

Q. What is the best way to prepare children for deployment?
   A. Parents must be honest and focus on their children's safety, security and continuity of routine. If deployment will change the child's lifestyle such as moving through, living with grandparents, or changing childcare, school or community activities, the child needs to hear of these things in advance.

Q. How else can we reassure our children about a deployment?
   A. First, parents should digest the information before they communicate it to children so they can deliver it in a calm and reassuring manner. Second, children worry about the safety of the deployed parent. It is important to let children know that the deployed parent is trained to do their job. Third, it is important to communicate in a way that your child will understand based on their age.

Q. How do children signal their distress?
   A. Stress affects children like it does adults. Children may complain of headaches, stomach distress and sleep disturbances. They may display moodiness, irritability, low energy, and have more dramatic reactions to minor situations such as stubbing a toe. It can be difficult sometimes to sort out normal distress and more serious problems. If in doubt, seek medical advice.

Q. How should school problems be handled?
   A. If there is concern about a child's behavior at home, parents should notify the school. Many parents may be reluctant to call attention to their child by warning school officials, but it is important for the school to be alert to any unusual symptoms. If a child has had psychiatric issues before the deployment they are more likely to have problems as a result of the deployment. It is important to talk to your child about any acting out, and get them to discuss their feelings and issues. Your child's school or your primary care doctor can arrange for counseling services.

Additional Resources

For information on talking with children about traumatic events, go to:

- American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
  http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/DISASTER.HTM
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
  http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/cmhs/TraumaticEvents/tips.asp