

Check-up check list: Be prepared for your child's doctor's appointment

June 1 2012

Everyone is strapped for time, especially busy moms and dads. From sporting events to music rehearsals or just acting as a chauffeur, it's hard to squeeze everything in. The juggling act becomes even more stressful when a child gets sick. Still, kids' health is a priority.

So, to keep kids healthy and help parents save a bit of time, Dr. Hannah Chow, a Loyola University Health System pediatrician, shares some tips to make the most of your doctor visits.

1. Cut to the chase

"We know you are busy, so if you skip the small talk, we don't mind. Share your concern right away and ask your most important questions first. I've had patients talk to me about smaller issues and by the time I'm ready to close the visit they say, 'What I really wanted to talk about is . . .' This makes it difficult to discuss what's really concerning you or your child. It might even be good to make a list of the questions you want to ask to make sure we cover your concerns in the visit, but keep it short," Chow said.

2. Stick to your three most important concerns

"I once had a patient pull out a list of 27 detailed questions. A typical visit lasts 15 minutes, including the examination, so by limiting your concerns you have a much better chance of getting a thoughtful, thorough answer. What might seem like a simple concern to a patient,

for example, headaches, involves many detailed questions on the physician's part and a more thorough examination compared to other issues. If there are longer, more complicated issues, it might be good to schedule a second visit to discuss things further. While it creates another visit, it allows me to pay better attention to all the patient's concerns," Chow said.

3. Make good use of the office nurse

"A physician's nurse is invaluable. My nurses know what I want from a medical standpoint, and they are a wealth of information. If you want to speak to a physician directly, first talk with the nurse, who can help you in a more timely manner. Often, I cannot answer phone calls until the end of the day. On a few occasions, I've found the patient's questions could have been answered by a nurse. We want to make the best use of your time so use all the medical staff resources available to you," Chow said.

4. Make sure your phone number and address are correct in your chart

"While this is my front desk's responsibility, I'm always surprised by the number of patients I cannot contact, even after I personally verify their information. I need a valid, working phone number and address so I can reach you for results, discussions and questions," Chow said.

5. Never assume no news is good news regarding tests, labs, X-rays and other similar results

"A friend of mine hadn't heard any news of her biopsy. One year later, she found out it was positive for cancer. Fortunately, everything turned out well, but I always ask all patients to call us for all results. There are times I cannot get hold of patients, whether through wrong phone numbers, incorrect addresses, not receiving messages, full voicemail

boxes or language barriers. Please, always contact your doctor's office if you do not receive a result in the expected time frame,” Chow said.

6. Fill out papers to the best of your ability

“Many times I'll have paperwork in my box stating, ‘Patient needs you to fill out forms to take his medication at school,’ and I have no idea which medication the parent wants me to approve. At the very least, fill out the patient's name, date of birth and medication on the form. One of my favorite moms fills out every part of the form, except my signature. I truly appreciate her efforts to simplify my work flow. The more details you can provide, the more you fill out, the faster you will get your paperwork back. If there are multiple forms, I will often ask to keep one to make sure I have filled everything out correctly,” Chow said.

7. Don't bring too many friends

“I get distracted if there's too much noise or activity in the room. One time I had seven kids tearing apart paper, looking into crevices, touching all the instruments and one very tired adult half asleep in the chair. If you have family members who will contribute to the discussion, bring them. Now I completely understand the need to bring other children to the visit, and I love seeing their siblings and their friends. But, depending on what you want to accomplish, use your best judgment as far as who should accompany you,” Chow said.

8. Schedule annual physicals early

“School is almost over and early summer is a great time to get your child in for their school physical. If you wait too long, doctor's offices are packed. With so many back-to-back appointments, it's even harder for [doctors](#) to give each patient the time and attention they want to give and that you and your child deserve,” Chow said.

Provided by Loyola University Health System

Citation: Check-up check list: Be prepared for your child's doctor's appointment (2012, June 1)
retrieved 5 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-06-check-up-child-doctor.html>

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