

Talk to your doctor about ways to trim health care costs

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(HealthDay)—Discussing medical costs with your doctor could save you money without affecting your care, according to a new study.

"Almost half the time that costs come up in conversation, either the doctor or the patient come up with some strategy to lower the patient's out-of-pocket cost. And it doesn't take long, usually less than a minute," study author Peter Ubel said in a news release from Duke University in Durham, N.C. Ubel is a professor in the schools of business, medicine and [public policy](#) at Duke.

He and his colleagues analyzed patient-doctor discussions from 1,755 outpatient visits across the United States. The [patients](#) had breast cancer, depression or [rheumatoid arthritis](#), all of which have potentially high out-of-pocket costs. The doctors were oncologists, psychiatrists and rheumatologists.

Conversations about costs occurred in 30 percent of the visits, and nearly half of those included

talking about how to reduce out-of-pocket [costs](#). Doctors were as likely as patients to bring up the topic.

Money-saving ideas included: looking for a cheaper pharmacy, trying less expensive prescriptions, spacing medical visits further apart, and booking costly procedures after patients had met their deductibles.

"They're so simple and straightforward," Ubel said.

Ubel said many doctors are more aware now of the financial stress patients face and are suggesting ways to help patients get more affordable care.

"They're mentioning if a new medicine is expensive, or they're asking if something is covered by insurance. If more doctors adopted this approach, patients could really benefit," he said.

The study was published online recently in the journal *Medical Decision Making*.

More information: The Kaiser Family Foundation has more about [health costs](#).

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