Preparing for Your Next Medical Appointment

Whether the patient is your child or yourself, you are an important part of a health-care team. Together with the orthopaedist treating you and/or your child, your team may also include physical therapists, occupational therapists, pharmacists, pain specialists, x-ray technicians and others involved with the ongoing treatment of MHE / MO / HME. During a doctor’s appointment, it’s easy to get sidetracked. Anxiety often runs high and can block your clearest thinking. Doctors have schedules to keep and are often pressed for time. If you feel pressured during the appointment, it may be difficult to stay focused on addressing each of your concerns. Maximize your time with the doctor by preparing for your appointments beforehand. Here are a few suggestions for making the most of your next appointment.

- Fill out the Clinical information form. You can call the doctor’s office and have these forms mailed to you before your medical appointment.

- If seeing a new doctor, or if you are having several problems that need to be addressed, tell the office when you call for an appointment that you will need sufficient time to talk to the doctor.

- If you or your child is a new patient, arrange to have medical records and x-rays transferred to the new physician before the appointment.

- Write down your questions and then prioritize them. For instance, put a #1 by the most important, a #2 by the next most important, etc.

- Start by asking the doctor the most important question first, then the next most important, and so on. Stay focused on your questions. If you wander into interesting side stories you will lose valuable time.

- When you arrive for the appointment, give the medical assistant a copy of your written questions and ask that they be put on the front of the chart so the doctor can see them.

- If possible, have someone come with you into the exam room. This person should also have a copy of the questions. He or she can take notes during the appointment and help make sure your questions have been addressed to your satisfaction.

- Bring all your medications with you to the appointment. Let your doctor know all the over-the-counter medications you are taking and how much.

- If you hear words you do not understand, ask for an explanation. Doctors are used to using medical terms and sometimes forget that it includes words the rest of us do not understand.
If the doctor does not have enough time, ask if someone else on his / her staff can answer your questions. Remember, you have a right to have your questions answered.

When a surgery is recommended, ask about the benefits and the risks, as well as any alternatives. Ask your doctor about pain management after surgery, as well as pain management after release from the hospital.

Ask your doctor to show you the X-rays and have him/her explain the surgery showing you the X-rays. This way you can show the doctor pointing to the X-ray something you may not understand.

Don’t be afraid to let your doctor know you don’t understand something.

Spend time after the visit talking with the person who came with you. He or she will likely have good insights about the appointment and can help you identify any areas that are still unclear.

Ask the doctor to send a copy of his /her report to your home.

Pain Issues can be better addressed by your doctor if you provide complete background information: If you have pain issues, you will want to fill out a pain diary. Make a copy of your pain diary to give to your doctor, so you can go over it together and the copy will be made part of your medical records.

Include the following information:

- Location(s) of your pain.
- Description of your pain: sharp, stabbing, burning, nagging, stiff, throbbing, etc.
- It’s helpful to also use a pain scale to describe your pain: 0 being the least amount of pain and 10 being the most amount of pain.
- How long does the pain last?
- How do you feel when you wake up?
- What aggravates the pain?
- When does pain start in the day?
- What activities cause pain?
- What is pain like at mid-day; what is pain like in the evening; what is pain like at night in bed.
Does pain wake you up?

Do you currently take medication for pain. If so, what do you take (name of drug, dosage)

Are there any other treatments that help relieve your pain (i.e. heat, ice, exercise, rest, etc.)

How long does it take to get pain relief after you take your medication?

Does pain come back before you are next scheduled to take your medication?

Does driving affect your pain?

What activities are you unable to do because of pain?

How does your job (or school) affect your condition?