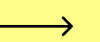


A guide to building a  
relationship with the  
right doctor


LOOM

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# Your Care Companion



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 We are misdiagnosed and underdiagnosed. Many of us face medical gaslighting, where symptoms are ignored or blamed on psychological factors. Research shows women's pain is taken less seriously, even in the emergency department. It's worse for BIPOC folks, who not only encounter biased doctors but also suffer negative health effects from the chronic stress of racism. LGBTQ+ patients routinely come up against barriers to the care they need.

These are institutional problems in need of radical change, which is [part of our mission](#). In the meantime, we know you're out there navigating these systems and we want to help you thrive.

This guide is meant to walk you through two important parts of advocating for your wellbeing: choosing a doctor and communicating with them.

We've also laid out sample scripts as inspiration for your next visit. Consider it a jumping off point. We hope you'll print out this guide and fill it with your own words. This is about getting your voice heard.

The four R's will help guide you to a good fit.

RESONANCE

REFERRALS

REPUTATION

RESEARCH

## RESONANCE

- Pay attention to how you feel around a potential doctor:
  - Do you trust their approach?
  - Do they make you feel safe?
  - Do you connect with them?
  
- Systemic racism and medical bias influence the quality of care, especially for BIPOC and LGBTQ+ patients. (That's why we created [an anti-racist care tool](#) to help Black pregnant folks address the impacts of medical discrimination.) Finding a doctor with a shared identity and ethnicity can be protective.

## REFERRALS

- Ask for recommendations from family, friends, and even your social media network.
  
- A trusted doctor can be a great resource for a referral.
  
- If you're a trauma survivor or have medical anxiety, ask for a referral from a trauma-informed doctor.

## REPUTATION

- Make sure a doctor's reputation aligns with your needs:
  - Are they known for the things you care about most?
  - Does what you've heard line up with your values?
  - Are they easy to make appointments with?
  - Are they responsive to calls and emails?

## RESEARCH


- Do your research, even if a doctor comes highly recommended.
- Go to your network of friends and family with follow-up questions.
- This research can help you build trust in the doctor.

It's normal to outgrow a doctor as your needs change. You can revisit the four R's at any point to see whether your doctor is still a good fit. Keep in mind: It's never too late to switch.

The trick is balancing your needs and their time—and the concept of Integrative Negotiation offers up a win-win approach.<sup>1</sup>

## WRITE A “NEEDS” LIST

Jot down a few things that you have to cover during your appointment. Try not to anticipate future needs. What do you need right now?



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<sup>1</sup> Gan I. Advancing a Distributive-Bargaining and Integrative-Negotiation Integral System: A Values-Based Negotiation Model (VBM). *Social Sciences*. 2017;6(4):115. doi:10.3390/socsci6040115.

## FIND COMMON GROUND

Look for points of human connection with your doctor. Are they a parent like you? Are you watching the same TV shows? What hobbies do they have?

## MAKE YOUR REQUESTS

Once you make a connection, refer to your “needs” list.

## IDENTIFY A TIME FRAME

This can be as simple as asking, “How much time do you have for this appointment?”

## TALK ALTERNATIVES

If your doctor suggests something that isn't aligned with your needs or values, ask for other options. Do you need a follow up appointment or a referral?

...when deciding on a procedure

“You’ve said this surgery isn’t necessary, but it might improve my quality of life. I’ve done my research. I want to move forward.”

“I understand what you’ve shared with me, but I’m making an informed decision against having the procedure.”

...when you want a screening or physical exam

“I’m filled with what-ifs. It’s way too much anxiety to carry around until my next visit. Can I come in early and be seen for some peace of mind?”

“I know I’m young, but so many of my symptoms feel like they could be perimenopause. What lab work can we do to be sure?”

“Previous ultrasounds didn’t show anything but it’s been a few months, and I’d like to have another look.

...when you need trauma-informed care

“I’ve put off a Pap smear for years because the speculum triggers me. Can you teach me how to do it myself, or walk me through each step before you do it?”

“I avoid getting on the scale because of my history with eating disorders. Are there other ways to assess my health?”

...when negotiating payment

“Is there a patient representative that can help me get additional screening covered by my insurance?”

“I’m afraid my insurance won’t cover my mammogram because of my age. Can you write me a letter arguing that it’s medically necessary because of my family history?”

...when you’re expecting test results

“Because of my learning style, I can’t easily understand test results on my own. I’d like to schedule a phone call or televisit to walk through my results.”

“I know that ‘no news is good news’ but I’ll be anxious no matter what. Can you call or email me regardless of the results?”

...when you don’t feel heard

“It sounds like you think my chronic pain is just anxiety, but I know my body. I want to schedule more testing to rule out other possibilities.”

“Can you document the various sensations that I’ve talked to you about recently? I know you say they aren’t relevant, but I want other doctors to see the full picture on my chart.”



...when changing doctors

“I know I’m late in my pregnancy, but I don’t feel safe with my current doctor. Are you open to taking me on as a patient?”

“I’ve had a good experience with you, but I want to work with a birthing center, so I’ll be switching doctors. Thanks for your care.”

...when starting with a new doctor

“I switched doctors because I was looking for someone who valued alternative approaches to healing. I was feeling judged for exploring alternative treatments.”

“My old doctor was a great physician, but it’s important to me that my doctor hold space for my concerns.”

...when you want a second opinion

“These results are confusing and you’ve said that the next steps can vary. I think a second opinion would help. Are you comfortable giving a referral?”