Practical Guide to the Health Care System:
Ten questions you should know

Sometimes a trip to the doctor’s office is not what we expect it to be. We may feel upset or unprepared for information the doctor tells us. To make the most of each visit with your health care provider, bring along this list of basic questions developed by AHRQ*. Being prepared will give you a sense of calm. Regardless of what lies ahead, you will feel more in control with these questions answered.

1. What is the test for?
2. How many times have you done this procedure?
3. When will I get the results?
4. Why do I need this treatment?
5. Are there any alternatives?
6. What are the possible complications?
7. Which hospital is best for my needs?
8. How do you spell the name of that drug?
9. Are there any side effects?
10. Will this medicine interact with those I’m already taking?

Purchase a notebook dedicated to your medical needs (or the needs of a loved one you are tending).

At each doctor’s visit, write the date and take notes of all important comments from your doctor. Between visits, jot down questions for your next visit or observations you have between visits. At the end of each visit, ask your doctor if there is pertinent written information you can take home.

* The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality’s (AHRQ) mission is to improve the quality, safety, efficiency and effectiveness of health care for all Americans. As 1 of 12 agencies within the Department of Health and Human Services, AHRQ supports research that helps people make more informed decisions and improves the quality of health care services. AHRQ was formerly known as the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research.

Coming in August: How to talk with a medical professional.

Prayer: Everlasting God, help me pay attention to my body and the bodies of my children. When something is not as it should be, remind me to seek help without delay. Amen.

Resources:
- advocatehealth.com
- mystrepthroatremedies.org/strep-throat-pictures
- kidshealth.org/parent/infections
- Search “strep throat pictures”
- cdc.gov/getsmart/antibiotic-use/URI/sore-throat.html

Take strep throat seriously!

Strep throat is caused by a highly infectious bacteria. It is passed on when someone with the disease coughs or sneezes openly into the air or shares food. You can even catch it if you touch an infected doorknob and then touch your mouth or nose.

Symptoms are usually more severe than a viral throat infection and may include an especially sore throat (often that comes on very quickly), difficulty swallowing, swollen tonsils or glands, white patches on tonsils and red dots in the back of the throat. Fever, headache, fatigue and rash may be signs, too. Call your doctor for a sore throat that lasts for more than 48 hours or a fever of more than two days.

Wherever there are groups of people in close contact, strep flourishes. While everyone is susceptible all year long, children between 5 and 15 are most at risk, and late fall and early spring are the times strep is most prevalent.

Never take strep lightly. It may lead to complications (infection of tonsils, sinuses, middle ear, skin, blood) or serious illnesses, such as scarlet fever, inflamed kidney and rheumatic fever which can affect the heart, joints, skin and nervous system.

Establishing hand-washing routines for children will lower their risk of getting strep. It’s worth the effort to teach them to wash frequently, thoroughly and for at least 15 seconds. (Singing “Happy Birthday” twice takes just that amount of time!)

Being a good role model yourself by washing your hands frequently may pay off handsomely in fewer trips to the doctor’s office and better all-around good health for you and your family.

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