

HealthyActions

Achieving Your Goals for Healthy Living



Keeping Doctor Appointments

Missed appointments are clearly a problem. A recent study in a community health center found that 73% of patients failed to keep one or more appointments, 43% missed one or two, and 30% missed three or more.²

Improving Interpersonal Communication With Patients⁶

- Slow down.
- Limit the amount of information you provide and repeat it.
- Use and offer written educational materials.
- Create a shame-free environment.
- Listen more and speak less. Sit rather than stand.

Missed Physician and Laboratory Test Appointments: An Obstacle to Treating High Cholesterol

- Missed appointments may be associated with an inferior quality of health outcomes due to lost opportunities for prevention, intervention, and continuity of care.
- Only about a third of patients being treated for high cholesterol are achieving their LDL goals; less than 20 percent of CHD patients are at their LDL goals.¹

Why Patients Miss Appointments²⁻⁵

Forgetfulness or miscommunication regarding appointment time or date

Transportation challenges

Lack of social or caregiver support

Lack of understanding of the severity of the problem

Lack of insurance coverage

Strategies to Improve Appointment Compliance²⁻⁵

During appointments:

- Set the stage for the appointment by outlining the benefits to the patient.
- Foster a relationship of trust and open dialogue. Exhibit personal interest and attention.
- Focus on what the patient is most ready and motivated to do.
- Reassure the patient that you are committed to helping them in reaching their goals.
- Track clinical results; reinforce and reward all positive behaviors and efforts.
- Explain the purpose of a follow-up visit and screening test.
- Assess the involvement of family members or caregivers in supporting the patient.
- Before the patient leaves, schedule their next appointment.
- Notify the patient they will receive a reminder before the next scheduled lab test and appointment.



Keeping Doctor Appointments

Missed physician appointments may be associated with poor health status and may also be the first sign that a patient is dropping out of care entirely.

Physicians and clinicians should structure patient visits to build relationships and encourage follow-up, stay in contact with patients between visits, and follow up immediately with patients who miss appointments.

Between appointments:

- A couple of weeks after each appointment, have an office nurse phone the patient to review information on the treatment regimen, answer questions, solve problems, and reinforce adherence behavior.
- A week or so before each appointment, phone the patient or send a postcard to remind them of scheduled lab tests and of the next appointment. Encourage the patient to bring a significant other or caregiver to the visit.

When a patient misses an appointment:

- Phone the patient. Reschedule the appointment.
- If the patient is unwilling to reschedule, try to assess why.
- Ask questions to ascertain problems the patient may be having that affect their ability to carry out health recommendations.
- Provide assurance that the physician wants to help the patient solve problems and enjoy better health.

References

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