

Information in this brochure is based on the work of:

Patricia Deegan, PhD, "Reclaiming your power during medication appointments with your psychiatrist" at <http://www.power2u.org/articles/selfhelp/reclaim.html>

Alameda County Behavioral Health Care Services, Office of the Medical Director which can be found at <http://www.acbhcs.org/meddir/MedConsent/English/questions.pdf>

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MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR MEDICATION APPOINTMENTS



QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT MEDICATIONS

What do I hope to improve about my life by taking medication right now?

What medication(s) have I taken before? At what dosage and for how long?

What was helpful or unhelpful about those medications?

The thing that worries me the most about taking medication is _____?

What's the name of the medication I'm taking?

What is the dosage and when should it be taken?

What symptoms or condition is this medication for?

How long before I should start to notice an effect from this medication?

What are the unwanted effects or side effects associated with this drug?

If I should experience unwanted side effects, what should I do about it?

Is the medication addictive?

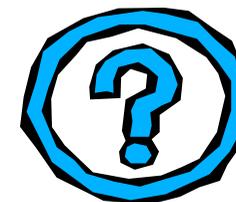
Will I need to take any lab test before or while I'm taking the medication?

Are there any foods or medications I should avoid while taking this medication?

How long will I need to take this medication?

Are there other medication choices?

Are there non-pharmaceutical alternatives to this medication?



STRATEGIES FOR RECLAIMING YOUR POWER

Strategy #1 **Learn to Think Differently about Yourself**

You are an expert on yourself and your mental health issues. It is up to you to notice the effects of your medications and to discuss them with your psychiatrist.

Be proactive and learn about your mental health issues and medications. Use the list of questions in this brochure to get clear about what information you need. Ask your psychiatrist any questions you may have about your medications.

Consumers have the right to determine what risks they are willing to take and to question the efficacy of these medications over the long term.

It takes more than the right medication to get well and stay well, but medications can alleviate enough of the symptoms to allow you to engage other coping strategies on your positive journey of recovery.



Give yourself credit for the positive changes you make.

Strategy #2 **Learn to Think Differently about Medication**

Medications are a powerful tool to deal with the symptoms of mental illness, but they are not the only tools and they are not a cure. Exercise, eating well, avoiding alcohol and street drugs, friends, spirituality, art and nature are some other tools that consumers have found can be helpful.



Taking medications is a personal choice. Learning to use a variety of non-drug coping strategies may help to minimize the amount of medications required, and for some people may eliminate the need for medications.

Knowledge of the medications you are taking can be very empowering. There are many sources of information including your psychiatrist, information sheets available from your pharmacist, drug-inserts provided by the pharmaceutical company, books available on the internet or at the library and the website of the Alameda County Office of the Medical Director at http://www.acbhcs.org/meddir/MedDir_default.htm.

Armed with knowledge about your medications, you can feel more confident in having a thoughtful and productive discussion with your psychiatrist.

Strategy #3 **Think Differently about Psychiatrists**

Due to rising health care costs, psychiatrists have less and less time to study charts and meet with their clients. Information that you can provide about your history and medications can be helpful.

It is useful to keep your own record of the medications you have tried, for what symptoms, at what dosages, and for what period of time.

When a new medication is discussed, you can easily check whether you have taken it before and with what results.



If necessary, request a second opinion

Doctors aren't perfect and may sometimes be wrong. If you are in doubt about your care, discuss your concerns.

Strategy #4 **Prepare to Meet with Your Psychiatrist**

Since psychiatrist appointments are very short, it can be useful to make notes, in advance, of the concerns or questions you would like to discuss. The more specific you can be about your issues and/or

symptoms the better. Track your experiences with your medications since your last appointment and summarize them before your meeting. Make an agenda for the meeting.

Strategy #5 **Take Charge of the Meeting**

At the beginning of the appointment, state your agenda. Take notes during the meeting, or immediately after the meeting, to remind yourself of the information the doctor gives you. If you wish, ask permission to tape record the meeting. Some psychiatrists may be uncomfortable with this request, but respectfully explaining your reasons for wanting a recording may eliminate the resistance. Another option is to bring a friend or support person since "two heads are better than one" when it comes to recalling information.

