



# Doctor Visits and Check-ups

## *Rehearsal Guide...*

*Preparing men and women with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) to successfully complete a medical appointment*



# INTRODUCTION FOR CAREGIVERS

A rehearsal guide contains realistic pictures, concrete ideas, and clear, brief instructions for guiding a person through what can be expected in a specific situation. It includes helpful suggestions for caregivers to follow to make the experience meaningful for the person and increase the likelihood of a successful outcome. This approach is beneficial when supporting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) who are anxious about situations such as doctors' appointments, hospitalizations, and medical testing.

A rehearsal guide provides opportunities for the caregiver to assist the person to learn about a specific situation. It contains information on what is needed and why and explains exactly what can be expected. Such a guide is most effective when it is person-centered and used in conjunction with discussion to allow exploration of specific areas of concern. It can be a powerful tool when used as intended. The expected result is that the person will then experience the situation in a way that supports health and well-being by being prepared and knowing what to expect. The guide can be used at all stages of the situation to facilitate a positive end result.

Thank you for taking the time to use this tool to work with self-advocates to improve their health outcomes.

## HOW TO USE THIS REHEARSAL GUIDE

For best results, begin to review this rehearsal guide with the person prior to the day of the appointment. Sometimes it will help to review this material with an individual several days or weeks before an appointment; other times, it may be better to wait to review this material until just before the procedure is to take place, perhaps the day before or the morning of the procedure. It is up to the caregiver to determine which will best suit the individual's needs and abilities in understanding the information provided; however, it is important not to wait until 5 minutes before a procedure to introduce this guide to an individual. Give the individual enough time in advance to become familiar with the procedure based on the pictures and information contained on each page and on the individual's abilities.

It is best to review this guide slowly and to focus on one idea/page at a time, allowing the person to talk and/or ask questions after each idea/page is presented. A caregiver may want to share experiences in regards to having this procedure done personally, but be sure to do so in a positive manner, depicting a positive outcome.

### **For best practices:**

- Allot time to review this material when the individual is alert and interested in doing so.
- Ensure that the setting is free from distraction. Based on the individual's attention span, it may be best to review one page at a time, rather than reviewing an entire guide in one sitting.
- Explain each picture and practice the suggested exercises with the individual, such as deep breathing, as they appear throughout the guide.
- Remain positive, calm, and upbeat.
- Remember to offer positive reinforcement and praise throughout the procedure, especially after the individual has successfully completed the procedure.
- **On the day of the procedure, take this guide along to continue rehearsing the various steps involved in the procedure. Review each page step by step.**

## INTRODUCING THE PROCESS

(Name of individual), you are going to visit the doctor for a check-up on (insert date here).

Doctor visits keep you healthy.

(Name of caregiver) will go with you and stay with you while you see the doctor.

Your visit will take place at (name of location).



**Note to Caregiver:** *This rehearsal guide covers many of the parts of a typical physical. The exact exam will vary from doctor to doctor. Caregivers knowing the routine of a particular doctor's office can customize this rehearsal guide by rehearsing the parts that apply and skipping or changing parts that do not.*

## IN THE WAITING ROOM

When you first get to your appointment, you will have to wait until someone calls your name.

(Name of caregiver) will stay in the waiting room with you.

Would you like to take a favorite book along to read or some of your favorite music to listen to on your headphones while you wait?



## WHEN YOUR NAME IS CALLED



When your name is called, a nurse may first measure your height and weight. You may be asked to remove your shoes before you get on the scale.



## TAKING YOUR TEMPERATURE

The nurse will use a thermometer to take your temperature.  
This only takes a few seconds.

Some thermometers go in your mouth and under your tongue. You will need to close your mouth with the thermometer in place. Do not bite down!

Some thermometers go in your ear. Other thermometers that roll across your forehead or just rest on the side of the head. With these, you don't even have to open your mouth!



## CHECKING BLOOD PRESSURE AND PULSE

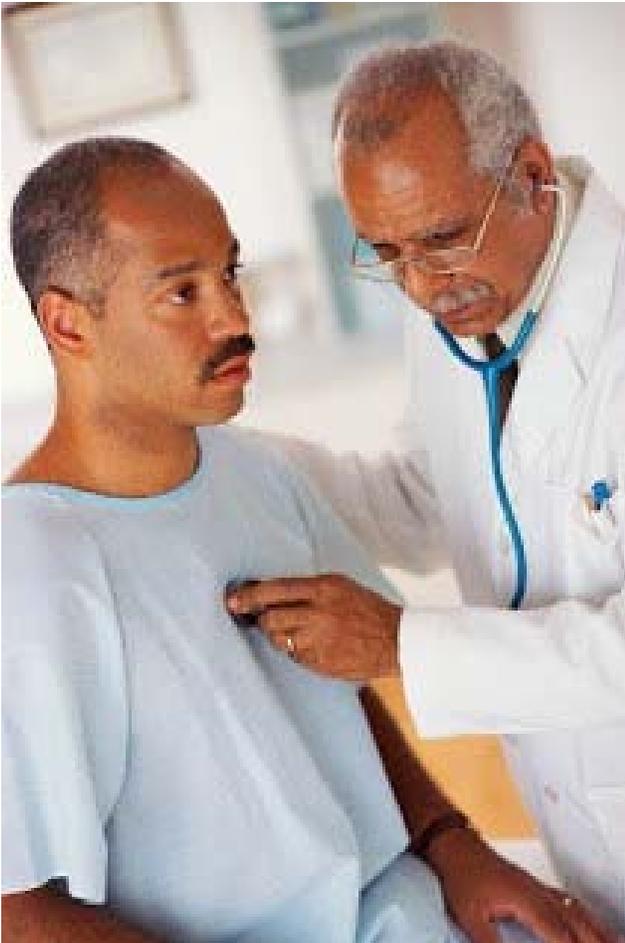


The doctor or nurse will check your blood pressure by wrapping a cloth cuff around your upper arm. Try to hold still and breathe normally. You will feel a little squeeze, and then the doctor will take the cuff off. This tells the doctor how hard your blood is pumping through your body.

The doctor may hold your wrist to check your pulse. This tells the doctor how fast your heart is beating.



## LISTENING TO YOUR HEART AND LUNGS



The doctor may listen to your heart with a stethoscope. See the stethoscope below. The doctor will put the stethoscope on your chest. This helps the doctor to hear how your heart is beating.

The doctor may also place the stethoscope on your back. This is so the doctor can hear how you are breathing. You may be asked to take a couple of deep breaths while the doctor listens.



**Note to Caregiver:** Encourage the individual to practice taking a deep breaths by breathing in slow and steady and then out again. Be sure to offer praise for a job well done!

## EAR EXAM

The doctor may look in your ears with an otoscope. This is a special flashlight for the ear. The doctor will put this gently into your ear. Hold still so the doctor can check for wax and make sure your ears are healthy.



The doctor may check your hearing by whispering in your ear. Then you will be asked what word the doctor said. You may be asked to wear headphones on your ears and let the doctor know when you hear a sound.

## OPEN WIDE!



When you open your mouth and say “Aah” the doctor can see your throat and tonsils. The doctor can also see your teeth and gums and check to make sure they look healthy. The doctor may gently feel the outside of your throat and neck. This will tell the doctor if there is swelling.

***Note to Caregiver:*** You may want to practice having the person open wide and say, “Aah.” Also, if you have any medical equipment such as a blood pressure cuff or stethoscope, you may want to show these to the person so that he or she may touch them and become familiar with the equipment.

## REFLEX CHECK

See the little hammer? This is what a doctor uses to check your reflexes. You may be asked to sit at the end of the table with your legs hanging over the side.

The doctor will then gently tap your knee caps.

This won't hurt at all.



***Note to Caregiver:*** Remind the individual that every exam may be a little different. The doctor may not check reflexes during a medical appointment.

## ABDOMINAL (STOMACH) EXAM



You may be asked to lie down on the table so the doctor can check your stomach. The doctor may listen to your stomach with the stethoscope. The doctor does this so he can hear if your stomach is working okay.

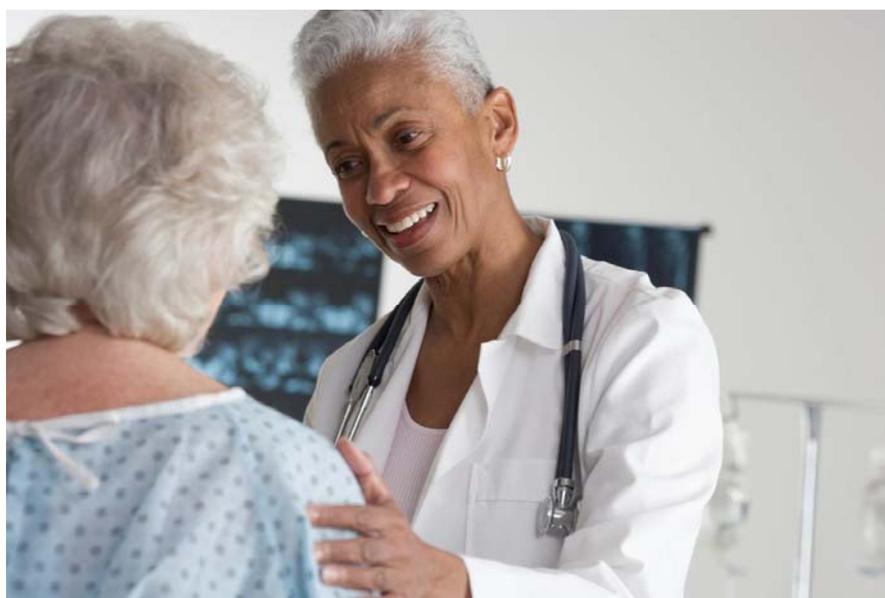
The doctor may carefully push on your stomach to check for any places that might hurt. Let the doctor know if anything hurts you.

## TALKING WITH THE DOCTOR

The doctor or nurse may ask you questions about your health such as, “Do you smoke? How is your diet? Have you been sleeping okay? Do you exercise?”

The doctor might also ask if you are having any problems and if you’ve been feeling okay. The doctor cares about how you are doing, so be sure to tell the doctor how you feel and if you hurt.

Your answers help the doctor know how best to care for you.



**Note to Caregiver:** Help the individual prepare for the doctor visit by writing down any complaints or concerns ahead of time. Be sure to take this to the exam. Practice by having the individual answer the questions above.

## ALL DONE!

When your exam is completed, the doctor may give you a prescription for medication or tests. The doctor may make some suggestions.

Make sure you understand the instructions before you leave.



**Note to caregiver:** Practice with the person asking questions of the doctor such as, “What is this medicine for? When is my next appointment? What can I do to improve my

**GREAT JOB! I KNOW YOU CAN DO IT!**



***Note to caregiver:*** Take time to assess how well the person understands what was presented. Ask questions such as, “Do you know what will happen when you go to see the doctor?” Revisit the story as often as needed to ensure the person understands and is prepared when the day of the doctor’s appointment arrives.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- National Institutes for Health (NIH). (2018, December 10). Clear Communication: Talking to Your Doctor. Retrieved from <https://www.nih.gov/institutes-nih/nih-office-director/office-communications-public-liaison/clear-communication/talking-your-doctor>
- National Institutes for Health (NIH). (2017, December). Talking With Your Doctor—Make the Most of Your Appointment. Retrieved from <https://newsinhealth.nih.gov/special-issues/seniors/talking-your-doctor>
- ♦ RESOURCES FOR INTEGRATED CARE. (n.d.). My Health, My Life Toolkit. Retrieved from [https://resourcesforintegratedcare.com/IDD/Care\\_Integration/Toolkit/My\\_Health\\_My\\_Life](https://resourcesforintegratedcare.com/IDD/Care_Integration/Toolkit/My_Health_My_Life)

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