

# “Questions to Ask”: Getting the most out of your medical appointment

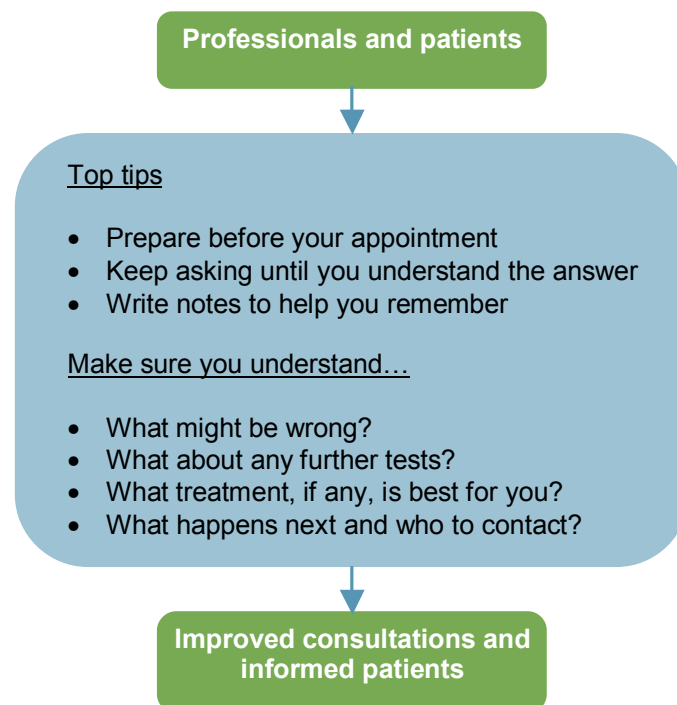
## What is “Questions to Ask”?

*Questions to Ask* has been developed by the Department of Health to help everyone get the best out of their appointment with their doctor or health professional.

*Questions to Ask* is designed to provide patients and carers with suggested questions to ask a health professional during their consultation through a series of prompts and tips.

*Excellent idea. Empowers people of all abilities*  
Consultation respondent

*Questions to Ask* is a short leaflet with questions on one side and tips for appointments on the other. It includes questions such as “Are there other ways to treat my condition?” and “How will I know if the treatment is working?” as well as tips like as “List or bring all your medicines and pills to the appointment” and “Write things down, or ask a family member or friend to take notes.” The diagram below summarises the process and content of the leaflets.



These kinds of checklists, prompts and tips are not a new idea, and *Questions to Ask* has been developed to provide general questions that can take people through any consultation. Many of the tools

that have been developed already are specific to a condition, treatment and setting. *Questions to Ask* is not intended as a substitute to these, but as a strong starting point that can acts as a stepping stone to better information.

*...in my experience, most people do not think of taking notes. A gentle reminder in the tips that most people forget what they want to ask, and that writing questions down aids the memory and empowers them*

Consultation respondent

## Why do we need *Questions to Ask*?

We know that shared decision making between patients and professionals can make a lasting and significant difference to healthcare outcomes, as well as improving patient satisfaction. Getting the right information and understanding conversations with professionals in appointments is key to involving people in decisions about their treatment and care. *Questions to Ask* supports this involvement, helping people to feel like partners in their healthcare.

## How has *Questions to Ask* been developed?

*Questions to Ask* was fully researched through an extensive review of existing materials and the contributions of more than two hundred patients and professionals. Questions and tips were drafted, then modified and added to through the responses to the consultation. The resulting *Questions to Ask* is a concise and simple list of tips and questions that can be easily understood and accessible to everyone. The questions have been developed in a natural style so they can be part of a real life dialogue between the patient and the health professional.

To assess the draft questions and tips, over eighty five patient, carer and professional organisations were contacted. People were asked about the content of the questions and the tone in which they were presented, as well as the style and format. The people that were consulted overwhelmingly felt that *Questions to Ask* would be a valuable tool, and were positive about its ability to encourage people to ask questions.

*It's a great project. You're giving us ideas that would help us.*

Refugee

*Its good..it gives people more information about their rights to ask questions.*

Mental health service user

*This leaflet will make a significant impact on my visits to the GP.*

Older person

*Questions to Ask* was developed to be an accessible tool for those people that are most likely to find it hard to ask questions of their health professionals. An outreach consultation was conducted to seek the views of groups at risk of health inequalities or social exclusion. Over 98 responses were received from people such as care home residents, faith groups, homeless people and refugees and asylum seekers. Nearly half of these people had experienced some difficulty with asking questions of their health professional. They commented on the format and wording of the leaflets, and 86% of people in this consultation found the wording used in the leaflets clear or very clear. The strong support shown for *Questions to Ask* suggests that it may be effective in helping some groups avoid exclusion from involvement in decisions about their health and treatment.

*Any support that can assist in maximising the potential of a consultation would be welcome*

GP

*Questions to Ask* has also been tested with a small sample of GPs, three quarters of whom felt that the tool would make consultations more effective. A similar number thought that *Questions to Ask* would help meet the need for greater patient involvement in decisions.

## How can I get copies?

*Questions to Ask* is now available as a two sided A5 leaflet, and will be distributed to most GP surgeries and pharmacies in Autumn 2007. *Questions to Ask* is also available in braille, easy read, large print and audio versions. In addition the leaflets have been translated into Arabic, Bengali, French, Gujarati, Somali, Portuguese, Polish, Punjabi, Spanish and Urdu. *Questions to Ask* has obtained the Crystal Mark for clarity approved by the Plain English Campaign.

All of these alternative formats (except braille) are available in electronic format which you can place on your website, distribute further, or print out your own copies.

You can order copies of the original leaflet or the braille, easy read, large print and audio versions via the DH Publication orderline from 8am – 6pm Monday to Friday:

- Phone: 08701 555 455
- Textphone: 08700 102 870
- Fax: 01623 724 524
- Email: [dh@prolog.uk.com](mailto:dh@prolog.uk.com)

To place an order use the product references below. All of these materials are available free of charge.

279234	QUESTIONS TO ASK LEAFLET
279234/AU	QUESTIONS TO ASK – AUDIO
279234/BR	QUESTIONS TO ASK – BRAILLE
279234/ER	QUESTIONS TO ASK - EASY READ
279234/LP	QUESTIONS TO ASK - LARGE PRINT

## How can I get further information?

If you would like electronic copies of *Questions to Ask* in any of our formats, or would like to know more, then please get in touch with the Market Research, Patient and Public Involvement team at the DH by speaking to Clare MacDonald (020 797 23726, [clare.macdonald@dh.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:clare.macdonald@dh.gsi.gov.uk)) or Julie Chapman (0113 25 46707, [Julie.chapman@dh.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Julie.chapman@dh.gsi.gov.uk)).