

# Discussion Guide

## Being your own health advocate – preparing for your annual exam.

If you're the average woman, odds are that your annual gynecology visit is not something you look forward to. You may even try and make excuses to put it off — it's completely natural to feel embarrassed, scared, or just plain uncomfortable (it's not fun!). But, it's one of the most important appointments of the year — so make a promise to yourself to keep this date.

### Before your appointment.

It's helpful to jot down a list of specific questions and concerns that you want to discuss with your doctor. Being prepared will help you make the most out of your visit.

**It's important to keep an open, honest relationship with your doctor – they are not there to judge you, but rather to help keep you healthy.**

### Update your doctor on new happenings in your life.

Your doctor should know everything that affects your health, including any stress that you may be experiencing. They like to know how you are feeling both physically and emotionally as both play a part in your health and how you feel. The more they know, the easier it will be for them to treat you.

### Bring a list of any medications you are taking.

Make sure to inform your doctor of all medications, herbal products, vitamins and supplements you take and if you've received any alternative medicines or treatments since your last visit. Also remember to write down the strength of all medications you are taking (for example, do you take 150mg or 200mg?)

**Know your body.**

**Share with your doctor any changes you are experiencing, even if they seem insignificant to you.**

### Tell your doctor of any abnormal symptoms you may be experiencing.

Ladies, we all get the monthly cramping, menstrual bleeding, bloating, sore breasts, maybe even a little back pain thrown into the mix. But if you are experiencing anything unusual or that you feel is abnormal or different than what you are used to, you need to share this information with your doctor. Or better yet, call your doctor if you think anything out of the ordinary is occurring, rather than waiting until your next annual exam. It's better to be proactive about your health — early detection could save your life.



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## Questions your doctor may ask you and things you may want to discuss with your doctor.

Be prepared to answer the questions below that apply to you. Complete and honest answers will help your doctor evaluate your health needs.

- When was the date of your last period?
- Do your periods come regularly? How long do they last? How heavy are they?
- Do your periods ever stop you from doing what you like to do?
- Have you ever had an abnormal pap test?
- Have you ever had a HPV test?
- Did you receive the HPV vaccine? If so, how many shots did you get?
- When was your last mammogram? (If you are over 40)
- Have you felt any discomfort in your breasts?
- When was your last colonoscopy? (if you are over 50)
- Do you feel pain during sex?
- If you are using birth control, how is it working out for you?
- Has your weight changed dramatically?
- Do you feel safe at home?
- Are you taking any medications, including non-prescription drugs?
- Is there a history of cancer, heart disease, or diabetes in your family?
- Have you been screened for osteoporosis? (if you are over 60)
- Do you smoke? If so, how much?
- Are you experiencing hair loss or skin changes?
- Do you have any issues with bladder control?
- What about vitamins, blood pressure, cholesterol?

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## After your doctor's visit.

How many times have you left the doctor's office and then remembered something you wanted to discuss with them? When this happens, and it almost always does, call your doctor. If you received treatment for symptoms you are experiencing and they are not getting better, call your doctor. If you had tests performed and you have not received the results, call your doctor. The bottom line is, don't ever be afraid to call your doctor under any circumstances. That is why they are there.

## Doctors don't always have answers to every question.

Even the best doctor may not be able to answer some of your questions. Remember, you are the best person to be your own health advocate, so don't stop until you know you've received the best care possible.



Call your doctor to schedule your annual exam.