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## Worried About Your Brain Health?

*Preparation For and Expectations from Meeting with Your Physician*

*by Dr. Amanda Mullen, PAC Certified Independent Consultant & Trainer*

Going to the doctor can be a stressful experience, especially when your concern is about cognitive functioning. It is important to prepare ahead of time so as to get the most out of this meeting with your physician. Try to create a list of symptoms that you or your loved ones have observed as well as a list of questions for the doctor. Reflect about any recent life events or lifestyle changes that might be prompting cognitive change. Have you experienced any changes in sleep habits, nutrition, social interaction, or endured a loss of some kind? It is not uncommon to discover that forgetfulness, difficulty concentrating, and changes in behavior are linked to underlying depression or anxiety.

Physical health and brain health are tightly connected. You can expect your doctor to review any previously diagnosed medical conditions as well as medications that you are currently taking (including over-the-counter medications and supplements). Bring a current list with you, and be sure to ask if medication side effects could be contributing to your difficulties. Since cognitive change can result from a reversible or treatable medical condition, a full medical workup is essential. Your physician may order tests that will determine if diabetes, thyroid dysfunction, cardiovascular disease, infection, vitamin deficiency, or less common issues such as tumor growth are contributing to the symptoms being reported. Such tests may include blood work and an MRI.

In assessing brain change, your doctor will need to know about any of your risk factors. These include medical conditions, as mentioned above, as well as alcohol use, history of head injury, and family history of dementia. Following your exam, you should schedule a follow-up meeting to review your test results and determine next steps. At this time, you may be referred to specialists for any treatable medical conditions. You may also be referred to a Neurologist for a more thorough neurological evaluation. A Neuropsychologist may be helpful in assessing your current cognitive strengths and weaknesses. Neuropsychological testing not only guides the diagnostic process, but the information collected can serve as a baseline for comparison of future test results. You may also choose to work with a Clinical Psychologist on addressing symptoms of depression or anxiety, creating positive life changes, and building compensatory strategies to cope with challenges related to brain change.

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