

EMPOWERING HEALTHCARE CONSUMERS: 4 Keys to Great Health Care



1. FIND A DOC YOU TRUST – AND WHO LISTENS

If your physician treats you like a customer at a drive-thru or makes you feel foolish for asking questions, get another doctor. Experts say one of the best ways to protect yourself is to find a physician who will take time to talk over a procedure's risks and benefits, and listen to your personal concerns.

2. EXPLORE THE DO-NOTHING OPTION

"If a doctor recommends an invasive treatment, such as hysterectomy or knee surgery, you should ask a series of questions," advises Shannon Brownlee, author of *Overtreated: Why Too Much Medicine Is Making Us Sicker and Poorer*. "Ask: Is there a less invasive treatment I can try first? What's the evidence this treatment will leave me better off than I am now? How good is the evidence? What's likely to happen if I don't do anything?" Query tests too. Experts know tests can reveal an abnormality that may never cause a problem – but once a little abnormality is found, it's hard for a doctor (or patient) to do nothing.

3. FIND A SECOND OPINION OUTSIDE YOUR COMMUNITY

If your condition is serious or can be treated multiple ways, it's worth traveling across town to a doctor affiliated with a different hospital – or perhaps even to another state to see a doctor there. Or get another point of view without hitting the road by trying a reputable online service that offers second opinions, such as MyConsult, run by the Cleveland Clinic. (The cost of online second opinions may not be covered by your insurance.)

4. SEEK DECISION-MAKING TOOLS

Many medical choices have no obvious right or wrong answer, only ones that work better or worse for you. In the case of breast cancer, for instance, one woman might prefer to preserve her breast – even though she'll have to be alert to the possibility of the tumor recurring – while another woman might choose to have a mastectomy. At <http://decisionaid.ohri.ca/decguide.html>, you can access worksheets used by the Center for Shared Decision Making to figure out what matters most to you.