

# Building Better Dialogues:

A Guide to Confident and Effective  
Conversations with Your Care Team



**WOMENHEART**

Many women report feeling dismissed or not taken seriously by healthcare providers, especially when discussing symptoms of heart disease. This can lead to delayed or misdiagnoses, putting women at greater risk for complications and delayed care. While some women have positive and supportive relationships with their healthcare teams, stories of dismissal remain all too common.

To combat this, WomenHeart is committed to empowering women to advocate for themselves. Being prepared, tracking symptoms, and asking the right questions can help ensure your concerns are taken seriously, and you receive timely and accurate care.

## **How to Prepare for Medical Appointments**

Taking a proactive approach to your medical care can make a big difference. Use these tips to prepare:

### **Document Your Concerns and Symptoms**

- Write down all symptoms you've been experiencing, even those you think might not be related.
- Note patterns such as when symptoms occur, what triggers them, and how long they last.

### **Prepare Questions in Advance**

- Make a list of questions to ask during your appointment.
- Be specific about your concerns, especially if you feel your symptoms have been overlooked or dismissed previously.

### **Track Your Medications**

- Keep a list of all medications you take, including dosages and consistency.
- Share this list with your healthcare provider at every visit.

### **Ensure Records Are Up to Date**

- Confirm that your HCP has received all relevant test results and prior medical records.
- Call ahead to check or ask for assistance in gathering documentation.

### **Consider Bringing Support**

- Bring a trusted friend or family member to your appointment. They can help listen, take notes, and advocate on your behalf if needed.

### **Take Notes During the Appointment**

- Write down key points, recommendations, or next steps.
- Use your notes to follow up on unresolved concerns or unclear information.

## Questions to Ask Your Healthcare Provider

### General Health and History

- Considering my family's medical history and my own, are there any concerns we should closely monitor?
- Are there any specific conditions I should be tested for based on my symptoms?

### Symptoms and Test Results

- Do you have concerns about my symptoms or test results?
- Are any of my test results out of range or abnormal? If so, what could that mean?
- Could the symptoms I'm experiencing signal a medical condition? Could it be related to my heart?
- What steps are we taking to rule out heart-related conditions?

### Treatment Options

- Is the medication I'm taking doing what we expect?
- If I experience side effects, how can I manage them?
- Are there alternative treatment options?
- If a medication is prescribed, what does it do? How long will I need to take it? How will we know it's working?

## Addressing Dismissal or Misdiagnosis

If you feel dismissed or your symptoms are not being addressed, consider these steps:

### Ask Specific Questions:

- What could be causing these symptoms?
- What testing do you recommend?
- What tests or evaluations can help rule out serious conditions, like heart disease?
- Are there any additional specialists I should see?
- If you're confident my symptoms aren't heart-related, what else could it be, and how should we investigate further?

### **Document Dismissive Behavior:**

- Write down specific phrases or actions that made you feel unheard.
- Use this documentation when seeking a second opinion or discussing concerns with another provider

### **Advocate for Yourself:**

- Politely insist on further evaluation if you feel something is being overlooked.
- Request referrals to specialists if your symptoms persist without explanation.
- Seek a second opinion if you feel your concerns are not being taken seriously. Second opinions can provide reassurance or uncover issues that were previously missed.

### **Key Takeaways**

- **Be Your Own Advocate:** Empower yourself with preparation, knowledge, and confidence.
- **Track and Share Information:** Accurate details about your symptoms and medications can improve care.
- **Ask Questions:** Never hesitate to seek clarity about your health or treatment options.
- **Don't Accept Dismissal:** Trust your instincts. If something feels wrong, push for further evaluation or seek a second opinion.

Your voice matters. WomenHeart is here to support you as you navigate your healthcare journey. Advocacy begins with preparation, persistence, and the confidence to demand the care you deserve.

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