

Communicating with your doctor

The patient-doctor relationship should be more of a partnership than a top-down, one-way relationship. Patients and their families work as a team with doctors and other health care professionals to ensure they receive the best care possible.

Things to keep in mind when visiting your doctor:

- Bring a list of questions.
- Arrive early so you can spend as much time as possible with the doctor or other members of the health team.
- Bring a list of all the medications, herbals, over-the-counter medications and vitamins you are taking.
- Bring a pen and paper to take notes.
- If you think it would be helpful, bring a friend or family member along to ask questions on your behalf and to support you.
- Keep asking questions until you understand your diagnosis, your treatments and what you need to do to get well.

Things to ask your doctor about your diagnosis:

- What do you think my diagnosis is?
- What else could it be?
- What does this mean for my day-to-day life & my future?
- What do I need to do to get well?
- Where can I get more information about my condition?

Things to ask your doctor about treatment options:

- What are my treatment choices?
- What kinds of studies have been done on these treatments?
- What are the benefits and risks of each treatment?
- How likely is each treatment to help me?

Things to ask your doctor about your medication:

- What does this medicine do to my body?
- What are other medicines that I could use and why are you recommending this?
- How likely is this medicine to help a person like me?
- What are the risks and benefits of this medication?
- Will the medicine interact with my other medications?

- What are the potential side effects?
- When can I expect to see results?
- For how long will I have to take the medicine?

Things to ask your doctor about psychological treatments (therapy):

- How will this therapy help me?
- What are other therapies that I could have and why are you recommending this one?
- What studies have been done with this therapy?
- What are the risks and benefits of this therapy?
- Are there side effects with this therapy?
- When can I expect to see results?
- For how long will I need to continue the therapy?

It is important for young people and their parents to know which treatments have the best evidence to support their use.

As a “**rule of thumb**,” it is usually better to use a treatment supported by evidence from many randomized controlled trials. Remember that the best treatment for you may not have yet been subjected to the highest standards of scientific evaluation. This is another reason why it is essential to have an informed discussion with your health-care provider to jointly decide on the best treatment for you.

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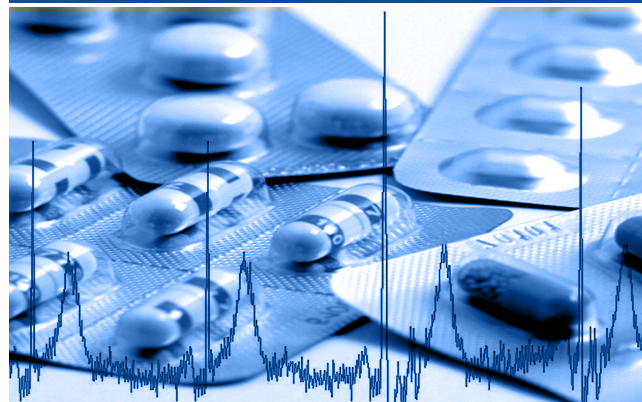
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WHAT IS EVIDENCE BASED MEDICINE (EBM)?



What is evidence-based medicine?

Evidence-based medicine (EBM) is a term used to describe how better decisions can be made in choosing treatments for best patient care (Haynes and Haines, 1996). The best evidence comes from the more than 20,000 scientific research studies published every year and “patient care” involves everything from diagnosis to treatment and monitoring of “getting well”. As you can see this is a complex thing, but it is the basis for best possible care.

EBM is NOT just a recipe for treatment!

People are NOT automatically prescribed the same treatment.

Deciding on a treatment for someone is a complex process involving three considerations:

1. The scientific evidence,
2. The expertise of your health provider(s),
3. YOU

Deciding on treatment

Here are some things to consider when deciding which treatment you should take:

1. Has the treatment been proven to work for people who have the same problem that I have and who are similar to me?
2. How well does this treatment compare to other treatments that are available to me?
3. Are there any side effects of this treatment?
4. Where did I get my information about this treatment? Is the information that I have reliable and trustworthy?

THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF EBM:

To help patients receive the best available treatment that is most appropriate for them personally!

Making sense of media reports

If you watch the news or read the newspaper you’ve probably noticed that medical research is often mentioned. BUT, you may not have realized that sometimes the media does not get the story right.

Health and the treatment of illness is complex & reporters do not always know the information inside & out! Sometimes media stories may be misleading - so always ask yourself:

- Is the story an advertisement for something?
- Is it sensationalized to make it sell more?
- Is there any background information that might help you evaluate it (for example, a discussion of the way the information was obtained)?
- Does the story give you different points of view or just one?
- Does the report provide expert opinion from people who were not involved in the story?

Making sense of websites

There is much misleading or incorrect information online. To identify websites that are more likely to be reliable and trustworthy, ask these questions:

- Who is responsible for the website? Is it a credible organization such as a national professional organization or a nationally recognized health provider?
- Who wrote the article you are reading?
- What is the original source of the article?

Websites created and maintained by credible organizations that provide access to the original research studies on which they base their information tend to be more trustworthy.

BE WARY OF:

- ▶ **Blogs** - They can be heavy on personal experience, with not much scientific evidence to support their statements.
- ▶ **Commercial sites** - Sometimes websites will try to sell you products or programs and will masquerade as a not-for-profit site.
- ▶ **Health myths and misleading words** - Don’t trust websites that use words such as “miracle” & “breakthrough.”

What is scientific evidence?

The scientific evidence used in medicine comes from thousands of research studies. Clinical decisions are usually based on studies that involve rigorously designed and conducted clinical trials and reviews of those trials, all of which contribute to medical knowledge on a given topic, and might inform future research.

The best evidence for safe and effective treatments comes from strictly designed and carefully conducted clinical trials (called Randomized Clinical Trials or RCTs). This type of research tells us whether a particular treatment is likely to work, how well it works compared to other treatments and whether the treatment has any risks.

DID YOU KNOW...

Scientific studies cannot prove anything with total certainty. Medical research informs medical care by helping determine how likely it is for an event to occur and not on the idea of total certainty.

Where can I read about research?

There are millions of research articles available online but you often have to pay to read them. However, the public library, hospital library & university library will let you access them for free. Here are some useful links to check out:

PubMed and PubMed Central: www.pubmed.gov

Cochrane Database: www.cochrane.org

HighWire Press: <http://highwire.stanford.edu>

MedlinePlus: www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus

Some research papers are also available free of charge in journals called open-access journals. Here are some links to check out:

Open Medicine: www.openmedicine.ca

PLoS Medicine: <http://medicine.plosjournals.org>