

9 RULES TO FOLLOW WHEN YOU SEE A DOCTOR

1. When you have any blood or lab tests done, ask the doctor to send you a copy of the lab results. You want to see whether there are any abnormal results. Sometimes the doctor's staff fails to give the results to the doctor or the lab fails to send the results to the doctor's office. Also, you want to maintain your own file at home of all lab results so that you know what results are normal for you. This will help you to easily identify any changes or trends which may signify the beginnings of an illness or disease. It is not safe to rely on a letter or phone call from your doctor generally stating that your tests were normal.

2. For Women: When you have a PAP test, ask your doctor to send you a copy of the written report by the pathologist (a doctor who specializes in microscopic examination of human cells and tissue) who examined your PAP smear. You want to see if there are any abnormal results. Sometimes the doctor's staff fails to give the report of the PAP smear to the doctor or the pathologist who examined the PAP smear fails to send the report containing the pathologist's findings. It is not safe to rely upon a letter or phone call from your doctor's office stating that your test was normal.

3. Request for Tests: If you ask your doctor to do a specific lab test, x-ray, or other procedure and your doctor refuses to order it, and you believe that the test should be done, go to another doctor. Also, under federal law (HIPAA) and state law, you are entitled to inspect and/or copy your medical records. If your medical records do not reflect that you asked for a test, and your doctor refused, you have a right to add your own comment to your medical records. The procedure for doing this is described in HIPAA.

4. When you see a dermatologist (a doctor who specialized in skin diseases) or other doctor who removes skin or other tissue from your body, ask your doctor to send it to the

pathologist for microscopic examination and to send you the pathologist's written report containing the pathologist's findings. It is not safe for the doctor to throw away the tissue without a pathologist's examination. It is not safe to rely upon a letter from your doctor stating that your tests are normal or "everything is fine".

5. When you have a chest x-ray done for any reason, make sure you ask for and obtain a copy of the radiology report for the chest x-ray. If the radiology report mentions any abnormalities seen on the chest x-ray, ask your doctor for an explanation of each of these abnormalities. A repeat chest x-ray two to three weeks later will be very helpful to further evaluate any abnormalities. You should ask for a repeat chest x-ray if your chest x-ray shows any abnormalities. If the abnormalities are still visible on the repeat chest x-ray, you should undergo a CT scan of your chest for better evaluation.

6. Whenever you have a colonoscopy, ask the doctor if any polyps were found. If a polyp was found, ask the doctor how big the polyp was, what the polyp looked like (flat or on a stalk) and what the doctor did with the polyp. As general rule, the larger the polyp, the more likely it is to turn into colon cancer or to harbor cancer. Also, some polyps are flat making them very difficult to remove during a colonoscopy. Whenever a polyp is found and removed during a colonoscopy, the polyp is sent to a pathologist for microscopic examination. Ask for the pathologist's written report containing the pathologist's findings. Polyps that are described by the pathologist as "tubulo-villous" or "villous" are more likely to become cancerous if they or some part of them are permitted to remain in the colon. If a tubulo-villous or a villous polyp was removed from your colon during a colonoscopy, you must make sure the doctor removed the entire polyp. Otherwise, you will be at continued risk of developing colon cancer until the entire polyp is removed.

7. If you are 60 or older and you fall and strike your head, you are at risk of developing a bleed around your brain that can be dangerous or fatal if untreated. You should go immediately to the emergency room and notify the medical personnel that you fell and struck your head. The hospital personnel should perform a CT scan of your head to make sure there is no bleeding.

8. If you are over 40 and you develop chest pain, you should go to the emergency room as soon as possible and notify the medical personnel that you have chest pain. The hospital personnel should immediately do an EKG, and should immediately take blood to check for heart attack markers. They should also have you seen by a cardiologist as soon as possible. With heart attacks, doctors often say that “time is heart”: the sooner a heart attack is diagnosed and treated, the less permanent damage it can do to the heart muscle.

9. If you develop numbness or weakness in the face, arm or leg, trouble speaking or understanding, unexplained dizziness, blurred vision in one or both eyes, loss of balance, difficulty swallowing, severe headache, or confusion, you should go to the emergency room as soon as possible. These may be signs of a stroke. Just as with heart attacks, the sooner a stroke is diagnosed and treated, the less permanent damage it can do to the brain.