What does it mean to be partners in health care? That is when doctors and patients work closely together—talking about health problems, making thoughtful choices, and coming up with plans that patients can, and will, follow.

This brochure looks at many aspects of quality health care. It includes:

- Questions about how you and your doctor approach staying healthy.
- Results showing how many Massachusetts patients answered these questions.
- Boxes to check with your answers about quality health care.
- Ways that patients can partner with their doctors.

We hope that this helps explain some aspects of quality health care. For more information, visit MHQP’s website www.mhqp.org.
Below are questions you can answer about experiences with your doctor. There are also lists of what patients can do to help make care better.

Do you and your doctor talk about weight, diet, and eating habits?

In a survey of Massachusetts patients, 77% said that their doctors always do this. Does your doctor talk with you about weight, diet, and eating habits?

- [ ] Yes, always
- [ ] Sometimes
- [ ] No, never

What you can do:

- Tell the doctor if you are worried about your weight, diet, or eating habits.
- Do not be upset if the doctor mentions these first. Weight, diet, and eating habits are very important to your health.
- Let the doctor know if you want help with your weight, diet, or eating habits. He or she might refer you to a certified nutritionist or a registered dietician.

Weight, diet, and eating habits can affect a person’s health. When a person is overweight or obese, he or she has a greater chance of having heart problems, stroke, high blood pressure, osteoarthritis, osteoporosis, type-2 diabetes, and certain cancers.

The best quality health care takes place when doctors — along with nurse practitioners, physician assistants, other clinicians, and office staff — work as partners with patients, family members, caregivers, and the public.
Does your doctor’s office remind you about preventative care?

This includes getting a flu shot, eye exam, and certain tests to detect (find, or screen for) cancer, such as a colonoscopy or mammogram.

In a survey of Massachusetts patients, 80% said that their doctor’s office always does this. Does your doctor’s office remind you about preventative care?

☐ Yes, always  ☐ Sometimes  ☐ No, never

What you can do:

• Talk with your doctor about ways to prevent or detect disease. Your doctor should explain benefits (how these tests can help) along with risks (problems that can happen as a result of these tests).

• Ask about tests you think you need. For instance, your friend may have said that it’s good to have an EKG (heart test). But is this test right for you? Talk with the doctor about needed tests for someone of your age and with your health history.

Doctors should do more than treat patients who are sick. Doctors should also talk with patients about ways to prevent disease, detect some diseases early, and how to stay healthy.

Do you and your doctor talk about things that worry you or cause stress?

In a survey of Massachusetts patients, 68% said that their doctors always do this. Does your doctor ask about things that worry you or cause stress?

☐ Yes, always  ☐ Sometimes  ☐ No, never

What you can do:

• Talk with the doctor about the types of worry and stress you have. For instance, mention whether there are problems at work, with your family, or if you have concerns about money.

• Ask if there is someone you can talk with about these problems. Your doctor might refer you to a counselor or therapist.

Too much worry and stress can be bad for your health. Studies show that these problems can increase the chance of getting certain diseases and affect how well people heal from infections.

Depression affects millions of people. It not only is a health problem itself but also can make other diseases worse. Doctors should find out if patients are at risk for depression.

Does your doctor ask if you are feeling sad, lonely, blue, or depressed?

In a survey of Massachusetts patients, 39% said that their doctors always do this. Does your doctor ask if you have been feeling sad, lonely, blue, or depressed for two or more weeks?

☐ Yes, always  ☐ Sometimes  ☐ No, never

What you can do:

• Tell the doctor if you have been feeling sad, lonely, blue, or depressed for two or more weeks.

• Ask if there is someone you can talk with about these problems. Your doctor might refer you to a counselor or therapist.

• Ask if there is someone you can talk with about these problems. Your doctor might refer you to a counselor or therapist.
Do you and your doctor talk about exercise and other ways to stay active?

In a survey of Massachusetts patients, 88% said that their doctors always do this. Does your doctor talk with you about exercise and other ways to stay active?

☐ Yes, always  ☐ Sometimes  ☐ No, never

**What you can do:**

- Talk with the doctor about exercise and other ways to stay active. Ask what to do given your age, health history, and goals. For instance, a patient who has arthritis may need a different type of exercise than someone trying to lose weight.
- Ask the doctor if you should be referred to a physical therapist.
- Find out if there are any gyms, fitness programs, senior centers, or other nearby places where you can go to be active and exercise.

*Many people are not as active as they should be. Studies show that this can lead to weight gain and increase a person’s chance of getting certain diseases.*

Massachusetts Health Quality Partners (MHQP) is a coalition of doctors, patients, hospitals, health plans, government agencies, and other health care organizations working to improve the quality of health care in Massachusetts. To learn more go to [www.mhqp.org](http://www.mhqp.org).

Ways to learn more about quality health care:

- **Consumer Reports** is an expert, independent, nonprofit organization that works to ensure a fair, just, and safe marketplace for all consumers and empower consumers to protect themselves. Learn more at [www.consumerreports.org](http://www.consumerreports.org).
- The Massachusetts Board of Registry in Medicine is a state agency that allows patients to learn about their doctors or file a complaint. The website is [www.mass.gov/massmedboard](http://www.mass.gov/massmedboard).

*When patients have a good experience with doctors, they are more likely to come back for tests, take medications as prescribed, and better manage their care at home. Quality health care matters a lot to both patients and doctors.*

—Michael Cantor, M.D., Chief Medical Officer of the New England Quality Care Alliance.

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