

How do I talk to clinicians?

Positive Experiences with Clinicians

SITUATION 1: LOW DIFFICULTY

People have different preferences for how to communicate with their clinician. Imagine you are visiting a new clinician for the first time. You have heard good things about this clinician, but you have a lot of questions and want to make sure that you get all of the information that you need to understand what is going on. If this is the case, it may be helpful to set expectations to give your clinician a sense of what typically works for you.

Suggestion:

“I’m someone who might ask a lot of questions.”

Or:

“It would help me if you would write down the instructions.”

Helpful tip:

Don’t be afraid to ask for a referral to an ostomy nurse. These nurses are also called WOCN, which stands for wound, ostomy, and continence nurse. Many people find these nurses really helpful.

SITUATION #2: HIGH DIFFICULTY

While seeing your clinician, your clinician asks if you have ever thought about using a convex appliance. You have never heard of a convex appliance and do not know what the word convex means. The brand and type of supplies you are currently using seems to work fine with only the occasional issue. You are wondering if there is something else that you can do to fix those occasional issues without making too much of a change.

Suggestion:

"I don't really understand what you mean when you say this, can you explain it so I understand?"

Or if you do not want to try a new kind of appliance:

This sounds like a good option. What are some other options that I could consider?"

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Negative Experiences with Clinicians

SITUATION #1: LOW DIFFICULTY

You are visiting a clinician to talk about your ostomy. The clinician asks you how often you change your ostomy bag. You prefer to change your ostomy bag a lot because it is more comfortable for you, but you are worried that changing your ostomy bag a lot is not going to answer what your clinician is looking for.

Suggestion:

“I change my ostomy bag (*say how often*), but if I had to guess, it fills up around (*say how long it takes to fill up*). Is that what you are looking for?”

SITUATION #2: HIGH DIFFICULTY

Imagine you are visiting a clinician. The clinician says that they want to perform an anal exam on you. However, you had a proctocolectomy, so you do not have a rectum for an anal exam. You tell the clinician that you cannot have an anal exam, but they insist.

Suggestion:

“I do not have a rectum, so I am not able to have this procedure. The information should be listed in my chart. Would it be helpful if I told you more about my ostomy or do you think we should talk to someone who has experience with my ostomy?”

Some people educate providers who don't know a lot about ostomies. One person's doctor asked if they had any pain or burning during urination. The person said, “If you know anything about urostomies, I literally don't feel anything when I urinate. So how can I have pain or burning during urination?”