



Guide to Effective Shared Decision-Making

Working together with your doctor to achieve better health outcomes

This guide has been created to empower patients to take a more active role in their healthcare decisions; it is not a substitute for medical advice. Always consult with your healthcare provider regarding your specific health needs.

What is Shared Decision-Making?

Shared decision-making is a collaborative approach where you and your healthcare provider make health decisions together. Rather than your doctor simply telling you what to do, or you making decisions without medical expertise, shared decision-making creates a partnership.

In this approach:

- **Your doctor** contributes medical knowledge and expertise
- **You** contribute your personal values, preferences and goals
- **Together**, you reach decisions that are medically sound and personally meaningful

Research shows that when patients actively participate in decisions about their care, they often experience **better health outcomes**, greater **satisfaction with their care** and **reduced healthcare costs** (Stacey et al., 2017).

Why Shared Decision-Making Matters

Benefits for you as a patient:

- **Better health outcomes**

When you're involved in decisions, you're more likely to follow through with treatment plans and take medications as prescribed (Shay & Lafata, 2015).

- **Increased satisfaction**

Patients who participated in shared decision-making report higher satisfaction with their healthcare experience and greater trust in their providers (Légaré et al., 2018).

- **Reduced anxiety**

Understanding your condition and having a voice in your treatment can reduce anxiety and help you feel more in control of your health (Stacey et al., 2017).

- **More personalized care**

Your unique circumstances, values and preferences become central to your treatment plan (Elwyn et al., 2016).

Common barriers to overcome:



Time constraints during appointments



Feeling intimidated or uncomfortable asking questions



Medical jargon that can be difficult to understand



Cultural or language differences



Uncertainty about your role in the decision-making process

This guide will help you navigate these challenges and become an active participant in your healthcare.

A step-by-step process for shared decision-making

Before your appointment

Prepare your health information

- Make a list of your current medications and dosages
- Note any allergies or adverse reactions to past treatments
- Record any symptoms you're experiencing
(when they started, how severe and what makes them better or worse)
- Write down any changes in your health since your last visit

Identify your priorities and concerns

- What are your main health concerns?
- What are your goals for this appointment?
- What outcomes are most important to you?
- What treatments or approaches are you comfortable or uncomfortable with?
- How does your health condition affect your daily life?

Arrange to bring a support person if needed

- Consider bringing a trusted friend or family member who can take notes or help you remember important information
- Let them know your goals for the appointment beforehand

A step-by-step process for shared decision-making

During your appointment

Share information clearly

- Describe your symptoms and concerns clearly and concisely
- Mention the impact on your daily life and what matters most to you
- Don't hold back important details out of embarrassment or fear

Ask questions about your condition

- What is my diagnosis?
- What caused this condition?
- How will it affect me in the short and long term?
- Are there any lifestyle changes that could help?

Discuss all treatment options

- What are ALL the available options?
- What are the benefits and risks of each option?
- How likely are these benefits and risks to occur?
- How effective is each treatment?
- What happens if I choose to do nothing?

Take notes during your visit:



Your shared decision-making checklist

- ☐ I have prepared a list of my **current medications, allergies and symptoms**
- ☐ I have thought about my **goals and priorities for treatment**
- ☐ I have shared details about my **symptoms and concerns**
- ☐ I understand **my diagnosis** and what might have caused my condition
- ☐ I know all **available treatment options**
- ☐ I understand the **benefits and risks** of each option
- ☐ I know how likely these **benefits and risks** are to occur
- ☐ I have considered how each option fits with my **daily life and values**
- ☐ I understand the **costs and logistics** of treatment options
- ☐ I have expressed **my preferences** to my doctor
- ☐ I understand the **next steps** in my care plan
- ☐ I know **whom to contact** if I have questions later

Helpful phrases to use during your appointment



To start the conversation

- “I’ve been thinking about my priorities for treatment.”
- “I’d like us to make this decision together.”



When you need more information

- “Could you tell me more about...”
- “I don’t understand. Could you explain that in simpler terms?”
- “How would this treatment affect my daily activities?”



When sharing your preferences

- “Based on what we’ve discussed, I’m leaning toward...”
- “That approach doesn’t align with my goals because...”
- “I’m concerned about... aspect of this treatment.”



When you need more time

- “I’d like some time to think about this and discuss it with my family.”
- “Could I have some information to review at home before deciding?”

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To learn more about shared decision-making, including Side-by-Side—TSF’s educational video series that showcases the impact of SDM and equips viewers with the knowledge and tools to apply it, visit www.sumairafoundation.org



References

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