**When Would I See a Cardiologist?**

If your general medical doctor feels that you might have a significant heart or related condition, he or she will often call on a cardiologist for help. Symptoms like shortness of breath, chest pains, or dizzy spells often require special testing. Sometimes heart murmurs or ECG changes need the evaluation of a cardiologist. Cardiologists help victims of heart disease return to a full and useful life and also counsel patients about the risks and prevention of heart disease. Most importantly, cardiologists are involved in the treatment of heart attacks, heart failure, and serious heart rhythm disturbances. Their skills and training are required whenever decisions are made about procedures such as cardiac catheterization, balloon angioplasty, or heart surgery.

**What Does a Cardiologist Do?**

Whether the cardiologist sees you in the office or in the hospital, he or she will review your medical history and perform a physical examination which may include checking your blood pressure, weight, heart, lungs, and blood vessels. Some problems may be diagnosed by your symptoms and the doctor’s findings when you are examined. You may need additional tests such as an ECG, x-ray, or blood test. Other problems will require more specialized testing. Your cardiologist may recommend lifestyle changes or medicine. Each patient’s case is unique.

In order to maximize the interaction between you and your cardiologist at your next visit, it is best to come prepared. There are materials you should bring with you and ways you should prepare for your appointment. Here are some tips for a more meaningful visit:

1. **Always bring a list of your current medications**. A sheet of paper with [all your current medications](https://www.cardiosmart.org:443/Tools/Med-Reminder) written out or typed out (including name, dose, and frequency of use) is an invaluable resource for your cardiologist. A list of any medication allergies is also helpful. Having these pieces of information written out helps ensure accuracy in your medical record.
2. **Carry a list of** [**your health care providers**](https://www.cardiosmart.org:443/Heart-Basics/Your-Health-Care-Team) including name, address, telephone number, and condition being followed. This will help ensure that communication between your cardiologist and all of your other care providers is complete.
3. **Compile a list of your past health history**. Important to include are any surgical procedures (with at least approximate dates), a list of any major prior or ongoing illnesses/health issues, and a list of any major tests, especially if performed within the last year. Knowing past health events can help the physician make a diagnosis or prescribe the best course of treatment.
4. **Compile a family health history of close blood relatives**. This includes brothers, sisters, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and children. From a cardiology perspective, what you are especially interested in finding out is whether any of your relatives have been diagnosed with heart disease, [high blood pressure](https://www.cardiosmart.org:443/Heart-Conditions/High-Blood-Pressure), [high cholesterol](https://www.cardiosmart.org:443/Heart-Conditions/High-Cholesterol), [diabetes](https://www.cardiosmart.org:443/Heart-Conditions/Type-2-Diabetes), or aneurysm. Knowing when any of your relatives passed away and cause of death is also important. A family history of health events can provide clues as to what illnesses/conditions you may be at risk for developing.
5. **If you have them, bring in copies of any recent lab results and any other test results from the past year**, especially if the testing took place with a different health care provider. This will help avoid duplicating tests unnecessarily.
6. **Write down a** [**list of the questions**](https://www.cardiosmart.org:443/Heart-Basics/Preparing-for-your-Visit/Questions-to-Ask-Your-Doctor) **you have about your condition** and bring it with you to the appointment. Keep the list realistic in length. You might want to pick the top 3 or 4 concerns you would like to have addressed during your visit. Even though this might seem silly, it is easy to get sidetracked during a medical appointment. Write down ahead of time what pieces of information you want to leave with.
7. **Keep yourself organized.** Putting all this data into a folder is a good idea so it’s easy to access during your visit. CardioSmart can be your central location for storing and accessing this information all in one place. [Register now](https://www.cardiosmart.org:443/Join).
8. **Don’t take anything for granted.** Although information systems are getting better, and communication between systems is improving, you are still the most reliable repository of your health care record. Keep your copy accurate and up-to-date.