Many people see more than one doctor or health professional. Your primary care doctor, such as your internist or family doctor, may refer you to another doctor for a problem. You may see a specialist for another health concern. You may need a surgeon.

Having many doctors can help you get the best care, but it also can cause problems. If you don't talk often to your doctors, or if your doctors don't talk to each other, you may:

• Be confused about which medicines you need to take.
• Not know which doctor to ask about a health problem.
• Be asked the same questions over and over, or be asked to repeat a medical test.
• Become frustrated because you're getting different advice on your treatment.
• Be more likely to experience medical errors.

You can avoid or reduce these problems and make things easier on yourself by working with your doctors. Below are some things you can do.

Have a health care team
When you have many doctors, think of them as your team. Tell each doctor that you expect him or her to talk with the other doctors about your care.

• Write down your doctors' names and what they do in your care. Give each doctor a copy of this information.
• Ask your primary care doctor to coordinate your care. He or she will know all the tests, medicines, and treatments you are getting and help you with any problems.
• Ask your other doctors to tell your primary care doctor their treatment plans, including tests, medicines, physical therapy, surgeries, and food or exercise suggestions or limitations.
• Ask your primary care doctor to help you list all your medical problems and treatment plans. This will help you and your doctor track your care and find problems more easily.

If you are being treated for both physical and mental health problems, be sure all your doctors know this. One problem can affect another problem. For example, a mental health symptom may make it hard to know that you have a physical problem. And some of the medicines used for mental health problems can lead to physical problems or make them worse.

Work with your team
Here are some ideas for working with your health care team:

• Ask about all your health problems when you see a doctor, but focus on your biggest needs or questions.
• If you don't understand something your doctor says or does, ask about it.
• Try to schedule doctor visits and tests on the same day and in the same part of town. This will help you save time and will be more convenient.
• Ask your doctors or their staff how long visits will take, including time in the waiting room. Knowing what to expect can ease your feelings about the time you spend on your health care.
• Ask your doctors if you can use email to ask questions and forward the answers to your other doctors. The answer you get from one doctor is important for other doctors to know. Be sure to ask about email security and the types of questions best asked in email.

• Ask your doctors to share your test results with you and the other doctors. You don't want to have to do the same test twice or wait for days while one doctor asks for the results of a test from another doctor.

Get the right advice
Having more than one health problem can be confusing. You may have problems understanding what you're supposed to do for each health problem.

Here are some examples:
• One doctor may suggest a high protein diet for COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), while another may want you to limit protein.
• You may be told to use corticosteroid medicines for COPD, but also to avoid them because you have diabetes.

• One doctor may want you to exercise a certain way, but another one may say you need to avoid exercise.

• One doctor may suggest a surgery at one hospital, but you may want to use another hospital.

• One doctor may order a CT scan, but you think you just had one last month for another doctor.

If you receive different directions from different doctors:
• Say so right away. Ask the one doctor to call the other and talk about the best approach.

• Contact your primary care doctor. Ask him or her to help you find what you need to do.

• Remember that it's your team, and your wishes are important. For example, if a hospital close to you and one farther away have the same care, tell your team that distance matters when choosing a hospital.

• Don't act until you are sure. For example, if you think you've just had a test, don't schedule another until you know whether you need it or already have had it.