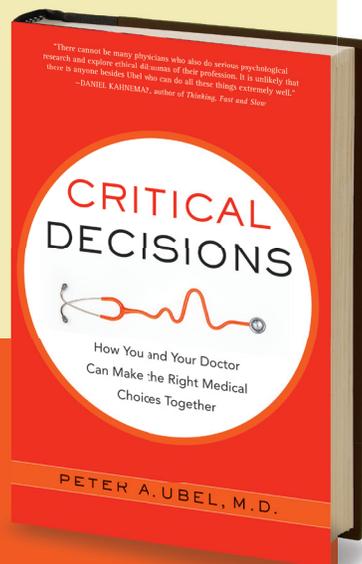


CHECKLIST: The 8 essential steps to becoming your own best medical advocate

Critical Decisions

***How You and Your Doctor Can Make
the Right Medical Choices Together***
By Peter A. Ubel



- ✓ **1. Recognize that you, the patient, have a role to play in your decisions.** The patient's own value system is an important factor in evaluating the pros and cons of different approaches. The patient should feel empowered to communicate those values and make decisions accordingly.
- ✓ **2. Realize that you are not alone.** Being an "empowered patient" doesn't mean being alone in making a final decision. It is okay to ask for your doctor's advice. Ask friends and family for guidance. The best choices often depend on teamwork.
- ✓ **3. Get informed about your alternatives.** There are some excellent online resources available. Some hospitals and medical clinics even provide a decision coaching service. If not, with some coaxing they may be convinced to find a nursing student, medical student, or other health care trainee to accompany you to doctor appointments.
- ✓ **4. Be an active listener.** If you don't understand your doctor, ask for clarification. Come to appointments prepared with a list of questions. If you feel shy, bring someone to your appointment who can take notes and ask questions for you. Remember, it's not rude to ask your doctor to take time to explain things again.
- ✓ **5. Communicate what you care about.** Do what you can to help your doctor give you the best advice. deathly afraid of surgery, for example, say so. Only when a doctor fully understands your values and needs can he or she make the decision that best fits your situation.
- ✓ **6. If you have time to decide, then take your time.** Making better decisions often means, literally, sleeping on it. Give strong emotions time to subside before making choices. Ask, point blank, how much time you have to make a decision, and use it. If there is time for a second opinion, get one.
- ✓ **7. Seek out help from other patients.** When forced to imagine the unimaginable, seek out people who have experienced the same situation and ask them about their lives. People are often better at emotionally adapting to difficult circumstances than they imagine they will be.
- ✓ **8. Stay informed.** Visit the Critical Decisions part of Dr. Ubel's website (peterubel.com). He is continuously unearthing decision-making lessons and posting them there with responses from his readers—so no one has to figure these things out alone.