

Communicating Symptoms and Needs in Medical Settings

This toolkit is intended to be used alongside appointments, either during preparation or as a reference in the moment.

Medical settings often require clear, efficient communication at times when symptoms, fatigue, or stress may already be elevated. For people living with Functional Neurological Disorder, describing symptoms and needs can feel especially challenging when experiences are complex or fluctuate.

This toolkit focuses on practical approaches to communicating in medical settings that support clarity, reduce cognitive load, and protect energy. It is not a guide to diagnosis or treatment.

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Focusing on Function Rather Than Detail

Healthcare providers often need to understand how symptoms affect daily functioning.

It may help to:

- describe what you are unable to do or what has changed
- explain how symptoms affect work, mobility, communication, or daily tasks

- focus on patterns rather than every individual sensation

Functional descriptions can support understanding without requiring exhaustive detail.

Using Clear, Simple Language

Complex explanations can increase fatigue without improving clarity.

Helpful approaches include:

- using short, direct statements
- avoiding unnecessary background unless requested
- pausing rather than pushing through when overwhelmed

Clarity does not require completeness. Saying less is often more effective.

Preparing Key Points in Advance

Preparing a small number of key points can reduce pressure during appointments.

This may include:

- the main reason for the visit
- one or two priority concerns
- any significant changes since the last appointment

Prepared points can serve as anchors if concentration or speech becomes difficult.

Communicating Limits and Capacity

It is appropriate to communicate limits during appointments.

You may choose to:

- state when fatigue or symptoms increase
- request a pause or break
- ask to focus on essential topics only

Communicating limits supports safer and more effective care.

Handling Questions That Increase Strain

Some questions may feel repetitive, overwhelming, or difficult to answer.

When this happens, it can help to:

- ask for clarification
- redirect to prepared information
- request to answer later or in writing

You are allowed to protect energy and clarity during medical interactions.

Using Written Supports When Helpful

Written supports can supplement verbal communication.

Examples include:

- symptom summaries
- appointment notes
- printed reference materials

Using written information does not replace conversation, but it can reduce cognitive load and support accuracy.

After the Appointment

Communicating during appointments can be draining.

Afterward, it may help to:

- rest before reviewing information
- write down what was discussed when capacity allows
- clarify follow-up steps if needed

Recovery after communication is a valid part of healthcare access.

Supporting Clear Communication With Care

Communicating symptoms and needs in medical settings with FND involves balancing clarity, honesty, and capacity. Preparation and simplicity can support more manageable interactions over time.

This toolkit is intended to support respectful, effective communication without placing unrealistic demands on the person living with FND.