

What are instrumental activities of daily living?

Instrumental activities of daily living (IADLs) are things you do every day to take care of yourself and your home. They are one way to measure how well you can live on your own. While activities of daily living (ADLs) are basic self-care tasks, like bathing, IADLs require more complex planning and thinking.

Aging and health problems may make it hard to do these tasks. You might not even notice that you can't do them as well as you used to. Often, the first sign that someone needs a little extra help is when that person can't do IADLs.

Your doctor uses IADLs to measure how much help you need. Knowing what you can and can't do for yourself is an important first step to getting help. When you have the help you need, you can stay as independent as possible.

Your doctor will want to know if you are able to do tasks such as:

- Use the phone — this includes answering and calling others.
- Shop for groceries on your own.
- Plan, heat and serve your own meals.
- Manage your medicines — this includes refilling them when needed and taking them correctly.
- Clean your house or apartment.
- Get around on your own either by car, taxi or public transportation.
- Manage money and pay bills.

If you are having trouble taking care of yourself or your home, talk with your doctor. You may want to bring a caregiver or family member who can help the doctor understand your needs and abilities.

How will a doctor assess your IADLs?

Asking about IADLs is part of a routine health checkup your doctor will likely do as you age. Your health check can be done in a doctor's office, your home or at a hospital. The goal is to find out if you are having any problems that could make your health problems worse or that make it unsafe for you to be on your own.

For example, to measure your IADLs, your doctor may ask:

- Do you ever cook using your stove?

- When you need to take medicines, do you take them by yourself? Or do you have help?
- How do you get to the store?
- Do you pay your own bills, write cheques yourself and go to the bank on your own?

It's common to feel worried or anxious if you find you can't do all the things you used to be able to do, but talking with your doctor about IADLs isn't a test that you either pass or fail — it's a way to learn more about your health and safety.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor or nurse call line if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

For 24/7 nurse advice and general health information, call Health Link at 811.

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