

TIPS FOR YOUR FIRST MEETING WITH YOUR PERSONAL INJURY ATTORNEY

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1. BRING ALL THE RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

These may include accident or incident reports, medical bills, medical records, witness statements and/or lists of potential witnesses, any papers or journals you have kept to describe your injuries, recovery and limitations, etc.

2. WRITE THINGS DOWN BEFORE THE MEETING

As discussed, it helps to have all information available that may help your attorney get you a fast and positive result. Remember, it's a team effort. Make lists of potential witnesses, insurance companies that are covering your property damage and injuries, and healthcare providers, with contact information. Keep a journal listing your injuries, your limitations, your doctor visits, and how your injuries are progressing over time. A meeting (and a legal case) will always progress more smoothly if you come prepared.

3. BE PREPARED TO FILL OUT SOME PAPERWORK

When a personal injury lawyer decides to take your case (and sometimes before taking the case), one of the first and most important things that will happen is the collection of medical records related to your injury. You will be asked to sign releases to allow the medical providers to send your records to your attorney for review and use in your case. If the attorney takes your case, he or she will mail these releases to everyone who has treated you, with requests for your records.

Another thing that might happen is that the attorney will ask you to sign a contract for his or her services. In a personal injury case, this will usually mean that you agree to give a certain percentage of the proceeds of your lawsuit to the attorney in the case of a courtroom victory or settlement, instead of paying for the services with an hourly rate, as you might with a different type of legal case.

4. ANSWER ALL YOUR LAWYER'S QUESTIONS AS THOROUGHLY AND TRUTHFULLY AS YOU CAN

Your lawyer will need to gather as much information as possible to assess whether your case is worth pursuing and what the likely outcome of your case will be. Questions can include, among other things:

- The details of the accident;
- The details of your treatment;
- Which daily tasks you can and cannot do since becoming injured;
- How long your recovery is expected to take;
- If a full recovery is possible;
- How the injury has impacted your personal and professional life;
- Your pain level; and
- Your medical bills and costs to date.

This is where journaling about your injuries and writing down the information about your accident and the health care providers can really come in handy! Lists of other people the attorney can talk to, like witnesses, insurance companies and health care providers, are also useful at this stage. The more information you can provide, the easier it will be for the attorney to decide how to move forward with your case.

In addition to providing all the necessary information, it is also important to be truthful with your attorney. Do not hold back details that you are afraid to tell him or her because they are too personal or even embarrassing. Your attorney has a duty of confidentiality, and your case will go more smoothly if your attorney has all the information and that information is accurate.

5. LISTEN TO YOUR ATTORNEY: HE OR SHE WILL GIVE YOU A PRELIMINARY OPINION AND EXPLAIN WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

If you have been able to provide your attorney with a pretty thorough breakdown of your injuries, expenses, and limitations, the attorney will most likely be able to provide a preliminary opinion on your case at the initial consultation (though he or she may need to gather more information first).

You might find out if the attorney thinks you can win this case in court, whether it is best to settle your case outside of court, and what some of the parameters are for figuring out the size of the reward you should seek. Your medical and loss-of-work expenses, your long-term limitations, and the level of fault of the other party will all be considered here. Your attorney may decide to take your case or, in some cases, refer your case to another who attorney may be able to better assist you due to your particular circumstances.

Your attorney may also tell you that you should wait to begin your case until you have reached your maximum level of recovery from the injury. This makes it more likely that you will receive full compensation for your injuries and for issues that may not be obvious when you first get hurt.