



GASLIGHTING

How to manage conversations about physicians/gaslighting

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This outline provides a comprehensive approach to managing conversations about physicians and gaslighting, fostering a supportive and empowering environment for participants. Adjustments can be made based on the group's needs and preferences to ensure a meaningful and impactful experience.

Session Topics

- Understanding Medical Gaslighting
- Definition and examples.
- Psychological and emotional impact.
- What you can do to empower yourself.

What is medical gaslighting?

Medical gaslighting refers to situations where a patient's concerns or symptoms are dismissed, downplayed, or not taken seriously by healthcare professionals. This can leave patients feeling invalidated, unheard, or even questioning their own experiences.

Here are some common phrases associated with medical gaslighting:

- "It's all in your head." Implies that the symptoms are purely psychological and not based on a physical condition.
- "You're just stressed." Attributing physical symptoms to stress without further investigation.
- "You're too young to be experiencing this." Or "You're just getting older; this is normal." Dismissing symptoms based on age, rather than assessing the patient's actual condition.
- "Everyone feels that way sometimes." Minimizing the patient's experience by suggesting it's a normal, everyday issue.
- "Your symptoms aren't life threatening." Downplaying symptoms by suggesting they aren't significant or serious.

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- "Your test results are normal." Suggesting that because the tests that have been run show problems than nothing is wrong.
- "You're overreacting." Suggesting the patient's concern is exaggerated or not worth worrying about.
- "You're probably just tired." Dismissing symptoms by attributing them to fatigue without exploring other causes.
- "Let's wait and see if it gets worse." Delaying action, which can make the patient feel like their concerns aren't urgent or important.
- "You're just anxious/depressed." Focusing on mental health as the cause of symptoms without considering other diagnoses.
- "That's not something you should be worried about." Invalidating the patient's concern by suggesting it's unimportant.

Dealing with medical gaslighting can be challenging, but there are steps you can take to advocate for yourself and ensure you receive the care you need:

1. Document Your Symptoms

Keep a Symptom Diary: Track your symptoms, their frequency, and any triggers or patterns. This can help you provide concrete evidence to your healthcare provider.

List Questions and Concerns: Before appointments, write down specific questions or concerns to make sure they are addressed during the visit.

Use [VeDA's patient forms](#) to help you communicate better with your healthcare providers.

2. Ask for Clarification

If a doctor dismisses your concerns, request a clear explanation for why they believe your symptoms are not serious or are related to something like stress or anxiety.

If you feel your symptoms warrant further investigation, ask about specific tests or referrals to specialists. See VeDA's articles on [diagnostic tests for vestibular disorders](#), and [definitions of vestibular specialists](#),

3. Seek a Second Opinion

If you feel your concerns are being dismissed, consider getting a second opinion from another healthcare provider. Different doctors may have different perspectives or

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approaches.

4. Bring a Support Person

Bring a trusted friend or family member to appointments. They can help ask questions, take notes, and provide emotional support, especially if you feel overwhelmed. A support person can also help affirm your experiences if you feel dismissed.

5. Communicate Assertively

Express your concerns assertively and clearly. If you feel dismissed, calmly state that you feel your symptoms are not being taken seriously.

Use "I" Statements: Frame your concerns with statements like "I feel that my symptoms are being overlooked, and I'm worried about my health."

Don't approach the situation like it is you against the system. You get the best results when you work cooperatively with your healthcare team.

6. Educate Yourself

Research your symptoms and potential conditions. This knowledge can empower you to have more informed discussions with your doctor. Print out VeDA materials and bring them to your healthcare provider.

7. Consider Switching Providers

Find a Doctor Who Listens: If medical gaslighting continues, consider finding a new healthcare provider who listens and respects your concerns.

Talk to other vestibular patients about their healthcare providers to get recommendations. There are many online platforms and support groups that support positive conversations. Avoid "doctor bashing."

8. Seek Support

If medical gaslighting has affected your mental health, consider seeking support from a therapist or counselor who can help you process the experience.

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Joining a support group, either in-person or online, can provide you with community and validation from others who have had similar experiences. You can find a vestibular focused support group on [VeDA's website](#).

9. Trust Yourself

Remember that you know your body best. Trust your instincts and advocate for the care you deserve. Your health concerns are valid, and you have the right to be heard.

Discussion questions:

1. Has a physician ever used any of the phrases above?
2. How did that make you feel?
3. Do you feel empowered to confront medical gaslighting? What can you do next time something like this happens?