Doctor Visits

Choosing a Doctor: Quick Tips

A primary care doctor is usually the doctor people see most often — and many people see the same primary care doctor for many years. Primary care doctors usually work as part of a team with nurses or other doctors who will also help care for you. When looking for a primary care doctor for yourself or a loved one, it's important to choose someone you can trust. A primary care doctor can:

- Help you stay healthy by recommending preventive services, like screening tests and vaccines (shots)
- Treat many health problems — including physical and mental health issues
- Refer you to a specialist when you need more help with a specific health issue
- Answer any questions you have about your health
- Give advice to help you build healthy habits

When you and your doctor work together as a team, you get better health care. Look for a doctor who:

- Treats you with respect
- Listens to your opinions and concerns
- Encourages you to ask questions
- Explains things in ways you understand

Try the following tips to find a doctor who's right for you.

Ask for recommendations from people you know.

Getting a reference from someone you know and trust is a great way to find a doctor.

- Ask friends, family members, neighbors, or co-workers if they have a doctor they like
- If you're looking for a new doctor because yours is retiring or moving, ask your current doctor for a recommendation

Check with your insurance company.

If you have health insurance, you may need to choose from a list of doctors in your plan's network (doctors that take your insurance plan). Some insurance plans may let you choose a doctor outside your network if you pay more of the cost.

To find a doctor who takes your insurance:

- Use the insurance company's website to search for a doctor near you who takes your insurance plan — or call your insurance company and ask for a list of doctors
- Then call the doctor's office and ask them to confirm that they take your plan — have your insurance card handy in case they need to know your plan details

If you don't have health insurance, you'll likely have to pay for health care out of pocket (on your own). For help finding health insurance, visit HealthCare.gov ⬀ . You may also be able to get some free or low-cost health services at community health centers or clinics. Find a health center near you and ask about which services they provide ⬀ .

Learn more about your top choices.

Make a list of the doctors you're interested in. Be sure to think about how easy or difficult it will be to travel to an appointment. Then call their offices to learn more about them. The answers to the following questions may help you make the best decision.

Questions about the doctor:

- Is the doctor taking new patients?
- Is the doctor part of a group practice? If so, who are the other doctors that might help care for me?
- Who will see me if my doctor isn't available?
- Which hospital does the doctor use?
- Does the doctor have experience treating my medical conditions?

- Does the doctor have special training or certifications?

Questions about the office:

- Are evening or weekend appointments available? What about virtual appointments over the phone or through a computer (telemedicine)?
- What if I need urgent care for an injury or sudden illness?
- What is the cancellation policy?
- How long will it take to get an appointment?
- How long do appointments usually last?
- Can I get lab work and x-rays done in the office?
- Is there a doctor or nurse who speaks my preferred language?

Think about your experience after the first visit.

Did the doctor and office staff:

- Make me feel comfortable during my appointment?
- Explain things in a way that was easy to understand?
- Listen carefully to me?
- Show respect for what I had to say?
- Ask about my medical history?
- Spend enough time with me?
- Give me a chance to ask questions?

If you answer "no" to any of these questions, you may want to keep looking. Remember — your primary care doctor is someone you may see for years, so it's important to choose someone you trust and can build a good relationship with.

Content last updated **May 23, 2024**

Reviewer Information

This content on choosing a doctor was adapted from materials from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality and the National Institutes of Health.

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March 2024

For more help choosing a doctor, visit:

- [Choosing a Primary Care Provider ⬈
  (http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/001939.htm)](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/001939.htm)

This microsite is coordinated by the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health, Office of the Secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Last updated: August 4, 2025