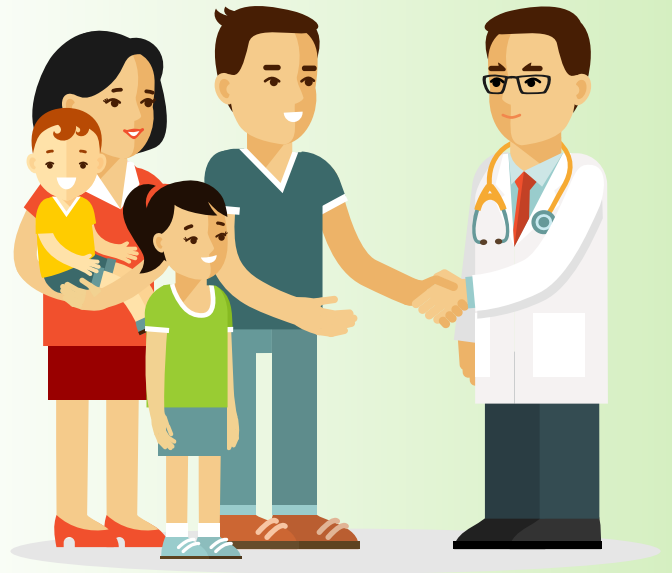


Five tips for choosing a primary care doctor



You will see your primary care doctor for most of your medical needs—when you're sick, for your check-ups, and when you have health questions or concerns. If your health plan requires referrals, your primary care doctor will also be the person who refers you to specialists.

Nurse practitioners and physician assistants also serve as primary care providers, so you may choose to see one of these provider types or a medical doctor. Whomever you see, it's important you have someone you feel comfortable with. Here are five things you should keep in mind as you look for your primary care provider.

#1 *Make sure your provider is in-network*

Most health plans contract with a specific list of doctors and hospitals. You will pay much less to see one of those providers, called "in-network" for insurance purposes. You can find out if a provider is in-network by contacting your health plan or calling your doctor's office.

#2 *Find a provider who will meet your needs*

There are different types of primary care providers to choose from (see *The Different Types of Providers and Who They Treat*: <http://oyhwacomm.wpengine.com/choosing-where-to-go-for-care/the-different-types-of-providers-and-who-they-treat/>). Family practice doctors treat the entire family. Internists treat adults. Pediatricians treat infants, children and teenagers. If you have a particular condition, such as diabetes, look for physicians with extensive experience managing your condition. Also, think about whether you would prefer a doctor of the same gender or age.

#3 *Consider reviews and recommendations*

You might feel more comfortable visiting a doctor who is recommended by someone you know. Ask around. And visit the Community Checkup (www.wacommunitycheckup.org/) to see how their medical group or clinic compares on quality and patient experience.

#4 *Think about convenience*

It makes sense to find a doctor close to where you live or work and one who has office hours that work for your schedule. Most clinics have websites where you can find out whether they have weekend hours and convenient parking. You may want to ask if the clinic has an online system for scheduling appointments, requesting prescription refills, communicating with your care team via email, and accessing your health records online.

#5 *Meet the provider*

An office visit and face-to-face meeting can help you make sure you're comfortable with your choice. Do you like the office, the physician, nurses and staff? Is the provider someone you'd feel comfortable with, who will spend enough time with you and who seems committed to helping you manage any chronic conditions you may have?

Source: Washington Health Alliance's Own Your Health initiative, <http://oyh.wacommunitycheckup.org/>

If you have narrowed down your choices to a few primary care providers, your next step should be to call their offices and ask questions to help you make a decision that fits your life and goals.



Questions about the provider:

- Is the provider taking new patients?
- Is the provider part of a group of providers sharing offices?
Who are the other providers?
- Who will see you if your provider isn't available?
- Which hospital does the provider use?
- If you have a medical condition, how much experience does the provider have in treating it?

Questions about the office:

- Does the provider offer evening or weekend appointments?
- What is the appointment cancellation policy?
- How long will it take to get an appointment?
- How long do appointments usually last?
- Can you get lab work and x-rays done in the office?
- Can patients communicate with the provider via email or access medical records online?
- If you are more comfortable speaking in a language besides English, is there a doctor or nurse who speaks that language?

You can also use the Community Checkup (<https://www.wacommunitycheckup.org/topics/>) to see how primary care providers rank in patient experience, preventive care, pediatrics, and more.