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How to choose a **primary care** physician



A primary care physician (PCP) is **good** for **your** health.



Why should YOU have a PCP?



Preventive care leads to earlier treatment and improved outcomes



Better patient-physician relationship and transparency of entire health history



Enhanced management of chronic diseases



Referrals to the best specialists when needed



Greater satisfaction of your health care



Lower cost of health care and decrease in hospital and ER visits

What kind of physician do I need?

Who qualifies as a primary care physician?

There are 24 specialties in medicine but typically only three qualify as primary care physicians (PCPs). Although in some cases an obstetrician/gynecologist can qualify as a PCP, often times only physicians with the following specialties are classified as PCPs:

Family practice or general practice:

A family practitioner is qualified to care for the entire family and is well rounded to treat a little bit of everything.



Pediatrics:

A pediatrician specializes in the overall well-being of children.



Internal medicine: An internist can medically diagnose and treat disease, but not perform surgery.



Why would someone need to **change** physicians?

Selecting a good primary care physician (PCP) is one of the best things you can do for your health. However, some times you may need to change physicians. Some of the more common reasons are because you moved out of the area or your insurance company changed. Here are some other reasons it may be time for a change.

You don't feel comfortable with your physician. If you can't have a candid conversation with your physician, it's time to make a change. According to a recent study, most patients reported that they could not talk openly with their physician. It's important to have a trusting relationship with your primary care physician. If you are facing a health crisis, you'll need to rely on him or her to help you make important decisions.



You're not happy with the physician's office. A well run, efficient front office makes a difference. If you can't get an appointment, if the staff are not providing adequate customer service, if you're often kept waiting, or if the hours are inconvenient, you're more likely to put off visiting your physician.



Your needs have changed. Just as children graduate from their pediatrician's office, you may wish to switch to a different type of physician for your general care. Your primary care physician does not have to be a general practitioner, and in some cases, someone who has a particular specialty may be more helpful for your overall care.



Should I make a change?



Consider these questions if you're not sure whether or not you want to change physicians right now.

- 👂 Do I respect my physician's approach to medicine?
- 👂 Does my physician make me feel like I am an active participant in my care?
- 👂 Does my physician listen?
- 👂 Do I have confidence in his or her skills and experience?
- 👂 If I suddenly became ill today, would I trust my physician to help me handle the crisis?
- 👂 Would my physician be able to communicate well with my family members and give them appropriate guidance?
- 👂 Does my physician communicate with me in my preferred methods, including by email or online?

If you didn't answer yes to all of the questions above, it may be time to consider a change.

Tips for choosing **your** primary care physician.

It's important to research and choose your new physician when you're healthy. Is it time for your yearly physical? Start looking now for a primary care physician. In many practices you can book an appointment to meet a physician before booking a physical exam. It will be very helpful for you and your physician to start your partnership when you're not facing big challenges, and a baseline exam will allow your physician to more easily recognize changes to your health status.

Here are three steps to help you choose the right physician for you

1 Know the difference between types of primary care physicians

Typically, your primary care physicians will be identified as family practice, internal medicine or general practice physicians. Choose the type that works best for you and your family.

Family practice

- Has certification or is board eligible in the specialty of family practice and has completed specific training in family medicine
- Treats patients of all genders and ages, from birth to the elderly
- Treats a wide variety of conditions, including those sometimes treated by specialists (OB/GYNs, sports injuries, pediatrics, etc.)
- A family practice physician treats the entire family for the majority of illnesses and serves as the coordinator of health care services for patients, providing continuous and comprehensive care.

General practice

- Typically refers to “family practice” physicians who received training before family practice became a certifiable specialty with specific training requirements
- May also include physicians who are osteopaths (DOs)
- Less likely to have board certifications

Tips for choosing **your** primary care physician.

(continued)

1 Know the difference between types of primary care physicians (continued)

Internal medicine

- Has certification or is board eligible in the specialty of internal medicine, and has completed specific training in internal medicine.
- Focuses on prevention, diagnosis and treatment of illness in adults.
- Treats a wide variety of general and chronic conditions, but does not typically treat serious injuries or diseases that may require specialized care (sports injuries, childbirth, etc.).
- Helps patients manage chronic diseases, such as diabetes, arthritis, digestive disorders and heart disease.

Pediatrician

- Most pediatricians treat children from birth until 18 years of age, or in some cases until a child graduates from college.
- Pediatricians are board certified or board eligible and can have sub-specialties such as surgery or pediatric cardiology.

2 List your needs

- Do you want your physician's office to be near your home or work?
- Do you prefer a male or female physician?
- Do you prefer that your physician's office staff be versed in a particular language?
- What's the most convenient time of day for appointments?
- Do you have a medical condition that requires a specialist?
- Do you need to find a physician who has weekend and evening appointments?

Tips for choosing **your** primary care physician.

(continued)

3 Narrow your choices

- Visit [ssmhealth.com/providers](https://www.ssmhealth.com/providers) and create a list of potential PCPs.
- Make sure they participate in your medical plan and are accepting new patients.
- Schedule an introductory appointment.

Is it time for your yearly physical?
Start looking now for a primary care physician.















Asking the **right** questions.

Making your initial appointment

Once your choices are narrowed down, it's time to make the call and schedule your introductory appointment. Use the following checklist of questions to help ensure that your choice will be a good match for your needs.

Checklist of questions to ask a primary care physician

-  How quickly do patients get an appointment?
-  Are same-day appointments available?
-  Can you email them?
-  How quickly can they return phone calls?
-  What are the office hours, and how are emergencies handled?
-  Is there a way to get simple questions answered without an office visit?
-  Are vaccines, labs and simple diagnostic tests done in the office?
-  Do the physicians in the practice have privileges at my preferred hospital?
-  Has the physician ever had hospital privileges suspended or revoked?
-  Where are routine X-rays and laboratory studies performed?
-  What's the approach for urgent, non-emergency needs after hours?
-  Does the office offer electronic access to my medical records?

Meeting your new physician.

Your introductory visit to the physician's office

What to look for during your initial appointment:

- Are the staff attentive and organized?
- Are phones answered in a reasonable amount of time?
- Is the waiting room clean?
- Is the waiting room full of people?
- Do you have to wait more than 15 minutes for your introductory appointment?

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