

# Be a Wise Health Care Consumer: How to choose the right doctor

## Select the best doctor to fit your needs

Choosing a doctor is a very important decision. Primary care doctors, specifically, typically provide you medical care over a long period of time, helping you stay healthy, manage your care and recommend specialists when needed.

### Different types of doctors will meet different needs:

- Internists and family practitioners are the largest group of primary care physicians for adults
- Women may see OB/GYNs for some of their medical care needs
- Pediatricians and family practitioners are the primary caregivers for many children

The following guidelines will help you find the best physician to meet your needs.

Review your health plan and any restrictions it has on the providers you can see—most plans have provider directories that list the doctors available to you. Make sure you know whether or not you are covered if you see a physician that is outside of the network.

### For each doctor that is available to you, find out:

- If the doctor is highly rated by a consumer or other group
- If the doctor has experience with your condition(s)
- If the doctor has privileges at the hospital of your choice
- If the doctor is part of your health plan's network
- If the doctor is conveniently located
- The doctor's office hours, including evening and weekend availability
- The doctor's cancellation policy and whether or not reminders are provided
- If the doctor provides urgent or emergency care
- If advice is available via telephone
- Anything else that is important for you, personally
- If you still haven't made a decision, you can try:
  - Asking doctors, friends, co-workers or relatives for a referral
  - Calling the American Medical Association at 312-464-5000 for information on specific physicians' training, specialties and board certification
  - Arranging an appointment or meeting with the doctors you are most interested in—if you are not comfortable around him or her, you will likely not be happy with the care you receive
  - Making sure that your doctor is someone that you trust is very important—take your time selecting a health care provider that truly meets your needs.

This article is not intended to be exhaustive nor should any discussion be construed as legal or financial advice.