



How to Locate, Investigate and Choose a New Doctor

One of the most important decisions you will ever make is choosing a primary care physician. Common sense says to choose a doctor you feel comfortable with and can easily communicate with. A good relationship with a doctor is more of an equal partnership, rather than a "parent-child" or "authority-subordinate" relationship. You will be working together to maintain your health and prevent any future problems. If needed, your doctor will make sure treatments recommended by other health care specialists are compatible with each other.

When choosing a new doctor, ask:

- Do I have to choose a doctor who is affiliated with my insurance plan?
- Do I need to choose a doctor who accepts Medicare?
- Where is the doctor's office? Is it easy for me to get to?
- If I need hospital care, is a particular hospital important to me?
- What kind of training does the doctor have? Is he or she board-certified and, if so, in what field?
- Do I feel it's important to see a male or female doctor, an older or younger doctor, or a doctor of a particular religion?

Ask your friends and relatives to recommend doctors and describe why they feel positively about them. Call the doctor's office and speak to the office staff. Note whether you like them and find them helpful. They should be able to answer these questions:

- Is the doctor taking new patients?
- Is the doctor affiliated with my insurance or does the doctor accept Medicare?
- What is the doctor's education and qualifications?
- What are the office hours for seeing patients?
- At what hospital does the doctor admit patients?
- How soon can I make an appointment to see the doctor?

- How long does an average visit usually last?
- What is the policy for patients who have an emergency and need medical attention quickly?
- What are the payment policies?

To find out more about the doctor you are considering, visit www.healthgrades.com, a service that provides names of doctors by area, and information about specific doctors.

Also, talk with your health insurance company about their requirements for doctors whose services they will accept. The two most common ones are that doctors must be:

- Included on a list of acceptable physicians
- Approved in their "network"

In addition, your health insurance company may require doctors to:

- Have medical privileges at certain hospitals
- Be board-certified in certain disciplines
- Agree to their billing limits for certain procedures
- Have a certain amount or type of malpractice insurance

Once you have chosen your doctor, make an appointment so he or she can take your history and examine you. Bring your medical records or have them sent to your new doctor well in advance, and take a list of all your current medications: prescription drugs and over-the-counter remedies such as aspirin, vitamins or herbal preparations.

If you are interested in learning more about geriatricians (doctors who specialize in treating older patients), visit:

<http://www.seniornavigator.com/content/HealthInformation/geriatrician.asp>

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