

Choosing a primary care provider

CONVERSATION GUIDE

Taking an active role in your health care is a good way to meet your health care needs and goals. Bring these questions to your appointment and take notes to help you remember your conversation later.

1. Learn the basics

What is a primary care provider?

A primary care provider (PCP) is responsible for overseeing your care and helping make sure you get the tests and treatments you need. Your PCP is the person you will probably see first for checkups and health problems, and who can help manage your overall health.

It's important to find a primary care provider who will meet your individual needs with high-quality care. A good patient-provider relationship is like a partnership, and good communication and collaboration is crucial to your health. You and your provider will work as a team, along with nurses, physician assistants, pharmacists, and other health care providers, to manage your medical problems and keep you healthy.

Who are primary care providers?

Different types of clinicians can be primary care providers:

- Internists or family practitioners, pediatricians
- Obstetrician/Gynecologists (OB/GYN)
- Nurse practitioners (NPs)
- Physician assistants (PA)

2. Find the right primary care provider for you

Good experiences with health care depend on the quality of care you receive. The quality of care you get can vary greatly, [depending on which provider's office you go to](#). Quality is not just about the technical skills of a PCP; it is also about the experience you have as a patient from the beginning to the end of your care.

Identify your choices

Ask friends and relatives, medical specialists, and other health professionals for the names of PCPs with whom they have had good experiences.

Ask your health insurance plan if the PCPs you are considering are in your plan's network and how much you will pay for services.

3. Make your choice

If possible, you should meet with a few different providers to find one that is right for you. When meeting the provider and the office staff, make sure they listen to you, explain things clearly, encourage you to ask questions, and treat you with respect.

Questions for your health insurance plan

- I would like to have initial visits with more than one primary care provider to decide which person and practice is right for me. Will my plan cover more than one of these introductory visits? If so, how much will I pay for these visits?
- Are the specific providers I'd like to meet are in my plan's network?

Questions for the provider's office staff

- Is the primary care provider taking new patients? Can you tell me about the provider's education and qualifications?
- Are introductory visits available, and if so, what is the fee, if my insurance plan does not cover the visit?
- Is this an individual practice or a group practice? (Usually, only doctors are in individual practices. Group practices can have a broader range of provider types, such as NPs and physician assistants.)
- Is there someone in the office who speaks my language?

Questions for the provider

- If the provider is part of a group practice, who are the other providers?
- Who takes care of patients after hours or when you are away?
- Which hospital do you use?

- I have a (particular medical condition), do you have experience treating it?
- How will I be able to communicate with you? Are there times set aside for you to take phone calls? Do you accept emailed questions? Is there a fee for this?
- If I have preferences about different kinds of treatments, will you be considerate of my preferences?

Learn more

Learn more about choosing a primary care provider:

- [Choosing Wisely®](#)
- [Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality \(AHRQ\)](#)

