

# Do I really need a primary care physician?

## What is a primary care physician?

Primary care physicians, also called primary care providers or PCPs, are health care professionals who either treat or coordinate treatment for all aspects of a person's medical care. They treat chronic conditions such as asthma, diabetes or heart disease as well as brief illnesses such as strep throat or the flu. They also provide routine health screenings, vaccines, and counseling on lifestyle changes to help you stay healthy. If you need additional care for an illness or condition, your PCP can help direct your care with other medical specialists.

Several different types of doctors serve as PCPs. You can choose which type works best for you:

- **Pediatricians** specialize in the care of children from infancy through young adulthood.
- **Family medicine doctors** are trained to provide care for the whole family, from birth to old age. Some family doctors also provide maternity care for pregnant women.
- **Internists** take care of adults of all ages.
- **Internal medicine-pediatrics doctors**, usually called Med-Peds, are trained in internal medicine and pediatrics and can care for children and adults.

People can also receive primary care services from other providers. Obstetrician-gynecologists and geriatricians are two examples of physicians who can be considered primary care doctors if they treat or coordinate all aspects of a person's health needs.

- **Geriatricians** provide comprehensive medical care for elderly adults. They are specially trained in the aging process.
- **Obstetrician-gynecologists**, referred to as OB/GYNs, diagnose and treat disorders of women's reproductive systems, monitor pregnancies and supervise childbirth.



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## Why do I need a primary care physician?

Don't wait until you get sick to find a doctor! The best time to start taking care of your health is before you get sick. Regular exams with your PCP ensure that you receive the preventive care you need when you need it and help you develop a relationship with your doctor. If you do get sick, your PCP can treat you or help you find a specialist if you need one.

## How do I find a primary care physician?

Before you look for a PCP, decide what type of doctor you want, and whether there are any characteristics that are important to you: gender, age, languages spoken, location of the practice, hours open. Do you want a doctor who will be your partner in your health care, or someone who is more of a trusted leader? Once you have decided on what is most important to you in a doctor, use these suggestions to help you find a PCP:

- The best way to find a new doctor is to talk to people who already know you. Ask friends and relatives for recommendations. Find out why they like their doctor and what the practice is like.
- Ask another health care provider you already know, such as your child's pediatrician or your OB/GYN. Because they already know you, they may be able to recommend a PCP who would be a good fit for you.
- Use the online search tool at [ExcellusBCBS.com](https://www.ExcellusBCBS.com).
- Use the "find a doctor" search tool on your local hospital's website.

Once you find a doctor that meets your criteria, confirm whether the doctor accepts new patients and also accepts your insurance. Sometimes practices that no longer take new patients will make an exception for someone referred by an existing patient or another physician. If the practice has a website, look it over to see what the practice's philosophy of health care is and what the practice policies are. Some doctors offer the option for you to make an appointment to "interview" them. This can help you decide whether the doctor seems like a good fit for you.

Remember, *you are the customer*, so take the time to find a doctor who is right for you.