



## CHOOSING A PRIMARY CARE PROVIDER

Everyone needs a primary care provider (PCP). This can be a physician, nurse practitioner or physician assistant who oversees your medical care. Some specialists, such as cardiologists and gynecologists, also serve as primary care providers. It's important to partner with someone you trust and are comfortable with.

### Call the office

Before you make an appointment, call the office and ask a few questions (there are suggestions below). This will give you a sense of how friendly and helpful the staff are. You should feel comfortable with everyone in the practice.

### Is this provider in-network?

You'll want to make sure the provider accepts your insurance, Medicare or Medicaid.

### Which hospital is this provider affiliated with?

If you only want to use a certain hospital, make sure the PCP you choose is affiliated with that facility.

### Does this provider see patients in the hospital?

Not all primary care providers see patients in the hospital. They may rely on the coverage of hospitalists (physicians, nurse practitioners or physician assistants employed by the hospital) or appoint someone to visit you in their place.

### What days does this provider see patients?

Ask which days your preferred PCP will be in the office to see patients. Decide if you will need to join a practice with evening or weekend appointments. Many practices now have extended hours to accommodate varying schedules.

### What if I'm sick?

Ask how the practice handles sick visits. Will you get an appointment the same day? What do you do if the office is closed? Is the practice affiliated with an urgent care center for issues that happen after hours?

### Is the practice owned or operated by a hospital?

If the practice is owned by a hospital or other commercial healthcare system, you may have to pay a 'facility fee' when you see your PCP or have any minor procedures done in the office. This fee is in addition to all other charges and may not be covered by insurance. Be sure to ask about facility fees (they can cost you hundreds of dollars out-of-pocket).

### Can I access a patient portal?

Patient portals are secure websites that allow you to access your health summary, visit notes, prescriptions, labs and other useful information entered by the practice. Many portals also allow you to book appointments online and communicate with your providers.

### How does this provider handle phone calls and emails?

Will you get to speak directly with your provider or do you talk with a dedicated nurse? Do you have the option of communicating with your PCP via email or a patient portal?

# Prudent Patient

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### Physician, Nurse Practitioner or Physician Assistant?

Many practices employ nurse practitioners (NP) and physician assistants (PA) as primary care providers. You will need to decide if you have a preference. Sometimes, you may be given the option to see an NP or PA if the physician is not available. You can find out more about the roles of NPs and PAs at [prudentpatient.com](http://prudentpatient.com).

### Check background and credentials

-To check physicians' and physician assistants' licenses, certifications, education & disciplinary actions go to [www.docinfo.org](http://www.docinfo.org).

-To check nurse practitioners' licenses & disciplinary actions go to [www.ncsbn.org](http://www.ncsbn.org).

-To verify physicians' board certifications go to [www.abms.org](http://www.abms.org).

Get more free checklists,  
guides and tools at  
[www.prudentpatient.com](http://www.prudentpatient.com)

### Things to consider after you've made your decision

-Come to your first appointment prepared. Bring your health summary, medication list, relevant medical records and a few questions or concerns to discuss. Your PCP only has a limited amount of time to spend with you. Being organized and ready means you'll get the most out of your visit.

-A confident, compassionate provider will appreciate you taking an active role in your own healthcare. If your PCP seems irritated by questions, makes you feel rushed, or dismisses your concerns, then you need to find another provider. There are lots of wonderful medical professionals out there. You don't have to settle for someone who is rude, condescending or dismissive.

-Sometimes, there will be unavoidable situations that your PCP just can't help. For instance, you may have to wait a little longer than usual if there is an emergency or you may not get seen the same day if your issue can wait until tomorrow. Try to be understanding in these circumstances.

-Get to know the practice staff who are helping take care of you (learn as many names as you can!). This includes the receptionists, the nurses and the medical assistants. Be sure to let them know they are appreciated.

**Choose a few of these questions to ask when you call the practice office (you don't want to keep them on the phone for too long!). You can likely find out a lot of this information by visiting the practice's website, too.**