



Know Your Benefits

Tips for Choosing the Right Primary Care Physician

Selecting a primary care physician (PCP), also known as a primary doctor, is a critical step in managing your health care. A PCP is who you visit for most medical needs, routine screenings and treatment of non-emergency illnesses. You can also go to them with your health-related questions and concerns.

Since your relationship with a PCP can have a major impact on your overall health and well-being, it's essential to find yourself a health care ally. This article provides tips for selecting the right PCP for your health care needs.

Finding and Selecting a PCP

The doctor-patient relationship is critical because you want to find someone you can trust and talk openly with about your health. Your PCP is also generally responsible for advising and educating you about your health care decisions, as well as examining and treating you.

Consider these tips for choosing your PCP:

- **Decide what kind of doctor fits your needs.** To initially narrow down options, assess your health care needs to understand what kind of doctor (e.g., family practice physician, general practitioner or internal medicine physician) will be the best fit.
- **Check your insurance network.** Once you've found some doctors that can likely address your health care needs, check to see if any of the doctors are in your insurance network. By choosing a network

provider, you may help reduce your out-of-pocket costs. Alternatively, you could also search the provider directory on your insurance company's website to find doctors near you.

- **Check doctors' locations and hours.** It's worth thinking about logistics like a doctor's location and hours before selecting them as your PCP. You will be more likely to get the health care you need if the PCP is close to your home or workplace and available at times when you'd be able to go. Language is another factor to consider since it's essential to communicate clearly with your doctor.
- **Ask for referrals.** Family, friends and co-workers can share their experiences to help you gauge whether their respective PCPs could be a good fit for you. Additionally, consider asking other health care professionals you're already working with who they'd recommend. Since you are looking for a health care provider you can trust, it makes sense to ask for recommendations from people you already trust.
- **Do your research.** It's always good to check credible sources for information about health care providers. At a minimum, PCPs should hold the appropriate licensing and board certifications in the areas of medicine they practice.
- **Connect with office staff.** When you've narrowed your PCP options down to a few candidates, call their clinics. Staff can answer logistical questions about office hours, average wait times for appointments, after-hours care, on-call services, online patient portals and telemedicine offerings. You may also get a good or bad first impression from talking with clinic staff. Since you usually interact with staff longer than the doctor, you'll want to ensure these workers are friendly, courteous and professional.

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- **Schedule an appointment.** Once you have chosen a front-runner for your PCP, schedule an appointment to review your medical history and any health concerns. If you feel that the doctor was knowledgeable and listened carefully to your health care needs, you likely have found a match.

Conclusion

It may take some time, but it's worth carefully assessing and selecting the right PCP for your health care needs. When you feel comfortable asking questions and trust the doctor, you're more likely to keep up with preventive care and address any health concerns.

Take your time choosing a PCP and be sure to visit them at least once each year to build and maintain the doctor-patient relationship. Talk to your HR representative if you have questions about in-network providers or health insurance offerings.