

# How to Choose a Physician

Use this Convenient Checklist to Help You Find the Right Health Care Partner

Everyone's version of the right doctor is different. There are many highly skilled physicians, and many of them have very different personalities and styles of practice. How do you find a health care partner who's right for you?

## STEP 1:

- Understand What's Important to You:** Make a list of the top 3 – 5 things that are most important to you in a health care provider. These can range anywhere from personality and philosophy of care, to insurances accepted and communication style, to location, office hours and education, and much more.
- Seek Out Information:**
  1. A good first step is to ask friends, family and colleagues about the physician(s) they see and whether they would recommend them.
  2. Many health care systems and hospitals offer online provider directories where you can narrow your selection of doctors based on several criteria such as specialty, location, gender, languages spoken, etc. At [www.prohealthcare.org/doctors](http://www.prohealthcare.org/doctors), for example, you can view each physician's individual profile and office information. And, some providers' profiles even include podcasts, vodcasts or links to additional information that can help you make a decision.
  3. If you don't have access to the Internet, you can contact a physician referral service like ProHealth Care's, which can provide you with physician referrals based on a variety of factors such as location, specialty, practice hours, philosophy of care and special interests. Call 1-800-544-2745.

## STEP 2:

- Inquire About a Get to Know You Appointment:** Once you have narrowed down your list to a few physicians, contact their offices and ask if they offer "get to know you" appointments. These brief, no-charge visits allow you to meet the physician in person to get a feel for their personality and communication style. Not all physicians offer this service, but you'll want to take advantage of it if they do.

If you don't have time for in-person visits, you can still review online profiles and even contact the physicians' offices directly to find enough information to determine whether the provider is likely to meet the top 3 – 5 things on your "most important list." (see *Step 1*) You can always use your initial office visit to ask more questions and determine whether the physician is ultimately a good fit for you and/or your family.

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When talking with your potential new physician or their office staff, consider the qualities that make a good health care partner:

- Caring:** Your health care partner should care about your comfort and listen to you. *Ask:* How much time do you spend with your patients? What is your approach to patient care?
- Trustworthy and comfortable:** You have to talk candidly with your health care partner so your concerns are understood and options for treatment are fully explored. *Ask:* How do you incorporate patient input into diagnosis and decision making?
- Expertise:** Examine the doctor's credentials. *Ask:* Are you board certified or board eligible? Have you completed any advanced fellowships? How many years have you been in practice?
- Willingness to be an educator:** Your physician should be able to provide health information specific to your needs. *Ask:* Do you like to teach your patients?

You'll also want to consider several other important factors:

- Electronic Health Records:** Does the physician use an Electronic Health Record (EHR)? An EHR is a computer file containing a patient's health information. With an EHR system, providers throughout an integrated health system — such as ProHealth Care, including its affiliated hospitals and physicians — can access and share a patient's vital information quickly, confidentially and securely. Plus, EHR's often have tools to aid physicians, such as alerts to medication reactions or that a patient is overdue for certain types of care. This can result in better and more comprehensive care, even in an urgent or emergency care situation.
- Extended Hours:** If you prefer to — or have to — see your physician outside the hours of 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. Monday – Friday, does he/she see patients at other times?
- Hospital Admissions:** If you prefer a particular hospital or health system, or your insurance limits you to certain hospitals for treatment, make sure you know where the physician admits his or her patients for both inpatient and outpatient care. If you prefer to have your hospital care close to home, consider where the physician admits for more critical cases – it may not be your preferred local hospital.
- Online Communication Capabilities:** Does the physician or the physician's office offer an online patient portal where you can make appointments, view test results, and/or send messages to the office? This is a very convenient service that more physician offices now offer. If you like to communicate online, you'll want to ask about this type of service.
- On-Site Diagnostics:** Does the physician's office offer on-site lab and X-ray services? If they don't, you will likely be sent to another facility for these services as needed.

### STEP 3:

- Compare Your Notes:** Review the notes you took during each visit or phone call, or information obtained through online profiles or a physician referral service. How did the physicians' answers or information match up to the criteria above? How well did they match up with your "most important list"?
- Trust Your Gut.** Oftentimes, you'll know a physician is right for you immediately after you meet him or her — or even during your initial conversation. It's always OK to trust your instincts.

For a referral to a physician who meets your needs, call ProHealth Care's Physician Referral Service at 1-800-544-2745. Our physician referral specialists are happy to help and want to make sure that you choose the best physician to meet your health care needs.



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