



Senior Series

The Ohio
Department of
Aging



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Tips for Choosing a Doctor

Having a primary doctor is crucial in maintaining good health and it is especially important as you get older. Your primary doctor can encourage you to live a healthy lifestyle (exercise, food intake), help you prevent disease, and help you make important medical decisions.

If you don't have a primary doctor or are not satisfied with your current one, the following suggestions may help you find a new doctor whom you can talk to.

1. Identify what are important factors in finding a doctor. Make a list of all the qualities that are important to you.

- Is the doctor covered by your insurance plan? Does the doctor accept Medicare?
- Do you have a preference about the gender, race, age, or religion of the doctor?

- What's the location of the doctor's office?
- What's the availability of parking, public transportation, or wheelchair accessibility (ramps, elevator)?

2. Ask people around you. Ask your family, relatives, friends, medical specialists, and other health professionals for the names of doctors they would recommend. Consider if any of these doctors match the qualities in the doctor you are looking for.

3. Consult reference sources. There are two resources available at many libraries that provide a list of doctors to choose from. These include *The Directory of Physicians in the United States* and the *Official American Board of Medical Specialties Directory of Board Certified Medical Specialists*. Remember to call your local medical society to check if any complaints or suits have been filed against the doctors you are considering.

4. Find out more about the doctors you are considering. Call the doctor's office and talk with the office staff about how the office runs. Or you may want to visit the doctor you are interested in (ask whether they charge you for this visit beforehand) and talk to the staff or doctor. Bring your medical records and a list of the medications you are currently taking. Ask the staff or doctor questions about the doctor or his/her practice. For example:

- What are the doctor's qualifications (board certified) and education?
- Does this doctor have many older patients?
- Does this doctor support alternative treatment?

- How does the doctor feel about involving family in care decisions?
- Will the doctor honor living wills, durable powers of attorney for health care, and other advance directives?
- Also inquire about office policies, such as office hours, house calls, waiting time per appointment, and length of the average visit.
- Ask about payment procedures.

5. Make a choice. Think about whether this doctor meets your needs, and whether he or she is a person you feel comfortable talking to about your medical care and other sensitive subjects (for example, sexual issues or depression). If you are not satisfied, visit other doctors you are considering.

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