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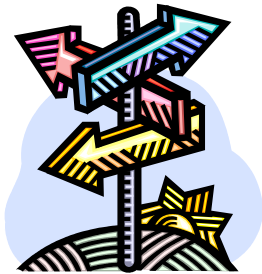
***Your* Clinical Team is available Monday through Friday 8am to 5pm MST at 1.800.355.0885**

*All information is confidential and HIPAA protected.*

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## Choosing a doctor: Factors to consider

Having a doctor who meets your needs is an important resource for maintaining your health. We have all heard the old adage "An apple a day keeps the doctor away." Eating apples may indeed be a preventive measure,<sup>1,2</sup> but finding a doctor you can rely on before you really need one is a wise plan to protect your health and prevent stressful decision-making during an emergency.



Choosing a doctor can be a challenging task. There are many reasons why you may need to find a doctor: you move to a new community; your doctor retires or is unavailable; your insurance or health plan changes; or you already have a doctor, but you don't feel confident in their care.<sup>3</sup>

So, how do you find a doctor that is right for you? Determining your needs, asking questions, and researching credible sources will lead you to an informed decision.

**Your Needs** Many people seek advice from family, friends, or coworkers about the right choice for a doctor. The people we know are often reliable and readily available sources, but ultimately you will have to decide which doctor is best suited to your individual needs and situation.<sup>4</sup> A first step is to think about what is most important to you and then make a list of requirements. Questions to consider:<sup>3,4,5,6,7,8</sup>

- ◆ What are important qualities you are looking for in a doctor?
- ◆ Do you need a primary care doctor? internist? specialist? surgeon?
- ◆ What training and experience do you want from a doctor?
- ◆ Should the doctor have a relationship with a hospital nearby?
- ◆ Does the doctor need to be a part of your health plan?
- ◆ Does the doctor take steps to prevent illness?
- ◆ Do you care if your doctor is a man or a woman?
- ◆ Do you have any language requirements?
- ◆ What are the doctor's office hours?
- ◆ Who covers for the doctor when he or she is not available?
- ◆ Where is the office located and how long does it take to get an appointment?
- ◆ Does the doctor use electronic medical records or have email access?
- ◆ Should your doctor hold board certification in a particular care area?



**Research** Once you have determined the type of doctor you are seeking and your needs, the next step is to identify doctors and research their training, qualifications, and reputation. It's helpful to identify several doctors you can choose from since you may rule out some of them based on your findings, or the doctor may not be taking new patients. Sources to guide your research:<sup>7,8,9</sup>

- ◆ Review your **health plan's** list of doctors as a starting point. Some health plans offer networks of high-performing or "honor roll" doctors.
- ◆ The **American Board of Medical Specialties** database lists doctors' names along with their specialty and educational background. You can conduct searches by doctor name or area of certification and by state. Users must register to use this free online resource. <https://www.abms.org/WC/login.aspx>
- ◆ The **American Medical Association DoctorFinder** database provides basic information on licensed doctors in the US. You can search for doctors by name or by medical specialty and location. <http://webapps.ama-assn.org/doctorfinder/home.jsp>
- ◆ To help establish reputation, check your **State Medical Board** to see if any actions, malpractice suits, or convictions have been issued against a doctor. The Federation of State Medical Boards provides a directory by state including website links and phone numbers. [http://www.fsmb.org/directory\\_smb.html](http://www.fsmb.org/directory_smb.html)
- ◆ You may also want to check whether the doctor is certified in his or her subspecialty. You can check on certification status on the **Administrators in Medicine DocFinder** database, a national organization for state medical board executives. <http://www.docboard.org/aim/index.htm>
- ◆ **MedlinePlus**, provides a searchable geographic listing of health libraries so you can find health information close to home. <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/libraries.html> Additional research tools: <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/choosingadoctororhealthcareservice.html>



**Making contact** After you've gathered names and established basic credentials, call the office of your top choice to make an appointment so that you can meet and talk to the doctor. You will likely be charged for the visit, but consider this initial interview an important part of the evaluation process. The office staff should be able to answer some of your questions right away about office hours, coverage, or how long it takes to get an appointment. During the appointment, keep in mind your list of requirements and notice if:<sup>6,7</sup>

- ◆ You are comfortable talking to the doctor.
- ◆ The doctor listens to you and respects you.
- ◆ The doctor takes time to answer all your questions.
- ◆ The doctor explains things in a way that is easy to understand.

**Final choice** Select a doctor you trust and that best meets your list of most important qualities. Consider variables such as background, training, and personality.<sup>3</sup> Communication with your doctor about medical care should be a two-way street. Good doctors offer information and recommendations but also listen to you and honor your preferences.

Your KnovaSolutions Specialist can help with your research by addressing questions or providing additional information. At KnovaSolutions, our role is to listen to your concerns and provide you with reliable information so that you can get the most out of your medical services. Getting the care you want and need is an important part of taking care of your health.

1. Apple phytochemicals and their health benefits. Nutrition Journal 2004, 3:5. Cornell University. <http://www.nutritionj.com/content/3/1/5>
2. Cancer chemopreventive potential of apples, apple juice, and apple components. Planta Med. 2008 Oct;74(13):1608-24. Epub 2008 Oct 14. [http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18855307?itool=EntrezSystem2.PEntrez.Pubmed.Pubmed\\_ResultsPanel.Pubmed\\_RVDocSum&ordinalpos=6](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18855307?itool=EntrezSystem2.PEntrez.Pubmed.Pubmed_ResultsPanel.Pubmed_RVDocSum&ordinalpos=6)
3. Selecting a Doctor. eMedicinehealth. [http://www.emedicinehealth.com/selecting\\_a\\_doctor/article\\_em.htm](http://www.emedicinehealth.com/selecting_a_doctor/article_em.htm)
4. Choose a Doctor. Melissa Stoppler, M.D. MedicineNet.com <http://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=47649>
5. Choosing the Right Doctor For You. Sutter Health Network, CA. [http://www.sutterhealth.org/facilities/tips\\_choosingadoctor.html](http://www.sutterhealth.org/facilities/tips_choosingadoctor.html)
6. Choosing a Family Doctor. Familydoctor.org. <http://familydoctor.org/online/famdocen/home/pat-advocacy/healthcare/836.html>
7. Your Guide to Choosing Quality Healthcare: Choosing a Doctor. Agency for Health Care Research and Quality. <http://www.ahrq.gov/consumer/qnt/qntdr.htm>
8. How to Choose a Doctor. Consumer Reports. <http://www.consumerreports.org/health/doctors-hospitals/your-doctor-relationship/how-to-choose-a-doctor/getting-started/getting-started.htm>
9. You Can Find Dr. Riight. With Some Effort. New York Times. Sept 28, 2008. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/30/health/30find.html>

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