



Choosing a primary care provider



A primary care provider (PCP) is a health care practitioner who sees people that have common medical problems. This person is most often a doctor. However, a PCP may be a [physician assistant](#) or a [nurse practitioner](#). Your PCP is often involved in your care for a long time. Therefore, it is important to choose someone with whom you will work well.

Information

A PCP is your main health care provider in non-emergency situations. Your PCP's role is to:

- Provide preventive care and teach healthy lifestyle choices
- Identify and treat common medical conditions
- Assess the urgency of your medical problems and direct you to the best place for that care
- Make referrals to medical specialists when necessary

Primary care is most often provided in an outpatient setting. However, if you are admitted to the hospital, your PCP may assist in or direct your care, depending on the circumstances.

When choosing a PCP, also consider the following:

- Is the office staff friendly and helpful? Is the office good about returning calls?
- Are the office hours convenient to your schedule?
- How easy is it to reach the provider? Does the provider use email?
- Do you prefer a provider whose communication style is friendly and warm, or more formal?
- Do you prefer a provider focused on disease treatment, or wellness and prevention?
- Does the provider have a conservative or aggressive approach to treatment?
- Does the provider refer to other specialists frequently or infrequently?
- What do colleagues and patients say about the provider?