HOW TO FIND A
PRIMARY CARE DOCTOR
THAT'S RIGHT FOR YOU

Do you only visit the doctor or a healthcare professional when you're sick? Do you often skip or completely neglect regular screenings and check-ups? If so, you're not alone. Before the pandemic, about 40 percent of Americans reported skipping a recommended medical test or treatment, and since the pandemic, that number has increased to 47%.

Proper self-care means taking care of yourself every day, not just when you get sick. To be sure, annual check-ups and preventive care are essential components to staying healthy throughout your life. Preventive care includes health services like screenings, check-ups, and patient counseling that are used to prevent illnesses, diseases, and other health problems, or to detect illness at an early stage when treatment is likely to work most effectively.

You and your doctor should work together to determine your best check-up and screening plan. You don't have a primary doctor? Not to worry! In fact, you can take this as an opportunity to find a doctor that best fits your situation and needs. Here are some considerations when selecting a new doctor.

Confirm your insurance plan is accepted and learn the costs if it's not.

Most insurance plans cover the entire cost of procedures like immunizations, cancer screenings, and blood tests, however, it's still ideal to ensure your doctor is covered under your insurance provider's network. Visit your insurance provider's website to find a list of physicians and healthcare providers covered under your plan. If you can't find this information, contact your company's HR representative. Or, if you have a healthcare provider in mind you can always call them and ask (have your insurance card handy so you can provide your plan's details). Your health care insurance provider most likely has a function on their website listing all in-network physicians in your area.

If the provider you want to see is out of your plan's network, call or visit your insurance provider's website to get clarification on what will and won't be covered. You don't want to get hit with any unexpected bills.

Consider your location and schedule.

Would you need evening or weekend appointments to accommodate your work schedule? If so, it's important to call and ask if the provider you have in mind offers appointments outside of the typical workweek. You'll also want to consider how long it takes to get to the office from your work or home. If it's an hour each way and you have a tight schedule you may want to look for something closer.

"Interview" your list of candidates.

There are some basic questions you'll want to ask your list of potential healthcare providers. Create a list and document each provider's answers. This will help you gauge how they stack up. Your questions should include:

» How soon could I be seen for an appointment?

» What's your rescheduling and cancellation policy?

» Am I expected to pay anything at the time of my visit?

» Do you offer evening or weekend appointments?

Also, take note of how the staff answers your questions. Are they friendly or do they seem irritated and rude? Do they answer your questions with enough detail or are they short and vague? The friendliness and thoroughness of the frontline staff is a good indicator that the entire healthcare team aims to serve their customers with best-in-class care.

Investigate your list of candidates.

There's a lot you can quickly check online to ensure you're selecting the healthcare provider that's right for you. For one, you can check if a physician is board-certified by visiting www.certificationmatters.org.

Unlike a medical license, board certification is a voluntary process. It demonstrates a physician's commitment to continually developing medical knowledge. You can also learn about licensing background and disciplinary information on the DocFinder physician directory.

Even if you've been putting off regular check-ups, remember that it's never too late to start routine screenings and appointments. Healthcare visits combined with a healthy diet, regular exercise, and reducing stress can go a long way in maintaining and improving overall health.

Ask an Expert

I know my doctor can tell me what screenings I need, but is there any other way to learn what types of preventive screenings I need?

You can quickly learn what preventive services you need by visiting https://health.gov/myhealthfinder. Just enter your age, sex, and pregnancy status and the tool will tell you. You can also use My Healthfinder to find out about the services recommended for a loved one.

YOU MUST COME FIRST! In order to take care of others in your life, you must first take care of yourself, and that includes making that yearly appointment with your primary care doctor.