

# healthy habits



Empowering Consumers with Better Health Care

Issue 4

## Choosing a Physician

Imagine you are in the market for a new car. You want to pick the right one – one that will give you the best quality for the best price.

You will probably go to a consumer magazine to check out several makes and models, talk to friends, ask questions at the dealership, and take a few test drives. You will conduct a lot of research before you write the check for the down payment.

Most people spend more time researching when buying a car than when selecting a physician. This is because information about cars is easy to find; information about physicians is not. In this newsletter, we will talk about choosing a primary care physician who will be the right one for you and your family.



**Did you know...  
most people spend  
more time buying a  
car than selecting a  
physician**

### Steps in selecting the right primary care physician

One of the keys to being an empowered health care consumer is finding the right primary care physician who can be a true partner for you and your family as you plan your health care. The benefits: improved health and lower overall cost as you get the right treatment at the right time.

Follow these steps to find the right primary care physician.

1. Determine the type of physician or other professional you want to have as a primary care physician. It is usually best to establish a relationship with a family practice or internal medicine physician since they have the training to deal with a broad array of health problems. Some people find that physician's assistants and nurse practitioners, who typically work alongside primary care physicians, may be the professional to see for immediate care. For children, a pediatrician is the best selection.
2. Review your health plan's list of participating physicians. These are physicians that have agreed to a discounted fee to see members of your health plan.
3. From the list of participating physicians, make a list of those who are conveniently located near your home or work.
4. Narrow your selection by checking on the background and training of the physicians on your list. Several resources provide information about a physician's training or disciplinary actions, if any. One resource is your state's medical board. To find the website for your state's medical board, go to the Federation of State Medical Boards website: [www.fsmb.org](http://www.fsmb.org). It provides a significant amount of information about physicians' backgrounds, training, and experience. Another useful Internet service to check out is [www.HealthGrades.com](http://www.HealthGrades.com), which provides a report on a selected physician for a small fee (see website for details). The report supplies the following information:

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- Professional background – education and training.
  - Board Certification Information – each medical specialty has a national board responsible for setting standards physicians must meet to become board certified. Board certification requires important training beyond medical school licensing.
  - Governmental Disciplinary Actions – State and Federal disciplinary actions from the previous five years.
  - Comparison to National Data – table compares selected physician to other physicians by three indicators of quality: experience, certification, and governmental disciplinary actions.
  - Physician Characteristics – physician languages and gender.
5. Narrow your list to two or three physicians by gathering information over the phone. Call the physicians' offices and ask a few questions:
    - Is the physician still a participating physician with my current health plan?
    - Is the physician accepting new patients?
    - If I am an established patient and I am calling for an office visit, how soon could I get an appointment?
    - What are your office hours?
  6. Based on the information you have gathered, call for an appointment with the physician who appears to meet your needs the best.
  7. Following your appointment, ask yourself, "Do I feel that I will be able to establish a comfortable partnership with the physician?" If the answer is no, call the next physician on your list for an appointment. Remember, the process of finding the right physician for you can have a significant impact on your health and quality of life.

## Selecting a specialist

To select a specialist, start by determining what type of specialist you need. There are a large variety of physicians who specialize in specific areas of health and may be more qualified to provide treatment than your primary care physician.

The following is a list of just some of the specialty areas in medicine:

Adolescent Medicine	Neurology
Allergy and Immunology	Obstetrics
Anesthesiology	Occupational Medicine
Audiology	Occupational Therapy
Cardiology	Ophthalmology
Chest and Respiratory Therapy	Osteopathic Medicine
Chiropractic Medicine	Otolaryngology
Clinical Psychology	Otology
Dermatology	Pain Management
Emergency Medicine	Pediatrics
Endocrinology, Diabetes, and Metabolism	Physical Therapy
Gastroenterology	Plastic Surgery
Geriatric Medicine	Podiatry
Gynecology	Preventive Medicine
Hematology/Oncology	Proctology
Home Health Aide	Psychiatry
Homeopathy	Pulmonary Medicine
Massage Therapy	Rehabilitative Medicine
Maternal and Fetal Medicine	Rheumatology
Midwifery	Speech Pathology
Neonatology	Sports Medicine
Nephrology	Surgery
	Urology



**The process of finding the right physician for you will have a significant impact on your health and quality of life.**

To learn about medical specialists and their areas of expertise, consult your health plan provider or primary care physician. Your primary care physician can help you identify when you may need to visit a specialist, and may even recommend a specific physician. To select a specialist that is right for you, follow the same steps you take in choosing a primary care physician.