Many health plans now require you to select a Primary Care Physician (PCP) for your medical care. But even if your health care plan doesn’t require it, developing a trusting relationship and comfort level with the same physician will allow you to achieve and maintain your personal health goals. People who feel comfortable with and trust their PCP are more likely to schedule regular appointments, and they’re also more likely to ask questions about their own health. PCP’s typically perform regular check-ups and screenings, and treat routine illnesses. They’re also likely to be your first call for health concerns, referring you to specialists when you require further tests or care. You’re PCP will have access to your medical history, existing conditions and recent treatments.

How to Choose a Primary Care Physician

Although finding a doctor within your insurance network is likely to be an important consideration, there are many factors to consider when choosing a Primary Care Physician.

- **Location**: Having a location convenient to home or work makes it easier to get to the doctor for routine care as well as when you’re sick.
- **Gender**: Many people prefer either a male or female doctor.
- **Language spoken**
- **Credentials**: Research the doctor’s education, certification and performance history (websites like [abms.org](http://abms.org) and [ama-assn.org](http://ama-assn.org) are great resources for this). Your health plan may also recognize physicians for quality and/or cost efficiency.
- **Inclusivity**: Ask about the doctor’s comfort and/or knowledge base in working with populations such patients who identify as LGBTQ, patients with different cultural backgrounds, patients with disabilities, or patients with a history of trauma.
- **Who Will Treat You**: Ask when you will see your physician and when you’ll see a nurse practitioner or physician assistant.
- **Focus**: Do you prefer a provider focused on disease treatment, or wellness and prevention?
- **Approach**: Does the provider have a conservative or aggressive approach to treatment?
- **Contacting the Office**: Is the office easy to contact? Can you access the office by email or through a website?
- **Coverage for Off Hours**: Does the office have phone/on-call coverage available 24 hours, 7 days a week? Are evening, weekend or holiday office hours available? Find out who covers for your doctor when he or she is not available.
- **Communication Style**: Do you prefer a physician who is warm and friendly, or a more formal relationship?
- **Involvement**: Do you prefer a physician who will allow you to be involved in your own care, or one who will assume more control of your care? Many PCP’s view themselves as your “Medical Home,” taking on the role of coordinating care with specialists and tracking patients to ensure they get the right tests. Medical practices like this often use a team-based approach, so patients should make sure that they feel comfortable with the other providers with whom they are likely to interact (i.e., nurse practitioners, physician assistants and nurses).
- **Referrals**: Ask friends, neighbors, relatives and co-workers who their doctors are. You can also ask advocacy groups to whom they refer clients.

Once you’ve narrowed the field, schedule an appointment with you top choice(s) to go over your medical history, discuss any current health concerns, and determine if you feel comfortable with them.