



# The ABCs on PCPs



## Choosing a primary care physician (PCP)

How did you pick your doctor? Did you get advice from friends? Did you choose someone near your home or work? Whether you go to your doctor rarely or often, you should find one you like and trust.

### Why do I need a PCP?

You may go to one or more specialists. Still, you should have a PCP for regular things like checkups. There are five main types of PCPs:<sup>1</sup>

- **Family practitioners** work with people of all ages. They offer a wide range of care, from checkups to pregnancy care. This type of doctor might be a good choice if you want to keep all of your family “under one roof.” A doctor who treats everyone in a family can get a better view of each person’s health.
- **Pediatricians** specialize in children’s health care. They treat kids from birth to age 18.
- **Internists** mostly work with adults. They offer a range of care, including preventive care. But they may have special knowledge about certain health problems. So if you have a long-term health problem, an internist who focuses on your problem may be a good fit for you.
- **OB/GYN** doctors specialize in the care of women. OB/GYN stands for obstetrician/gynecologist. If you’re a teenage girl or a woman of childbearing age, this type of doctor might be a good choice for you.
- **Nurse practitioners** and **physician assistants** aren’t doctors, but they’ve received a lot of training and can do many of the same things. For instance, they may give shots, do checkups and treat some health problems. They may be the main person you work with, or they may work with a doctor.

### Resources

For more tips, visit the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality online at [ahrq.gov](http://ahrq.gov). Click on “For Patients & Consumers” then type “Choosing Quality Care” in the search box on the right. You’ll find articles, checklists and more. Plus you can find links to tools that will help you check PCP certifications and quality ratings.



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Certain factual or statistical information was derived from the following sources:

1 National Institute on Aging, “Choosing a doctor,” [nia.nih.gov](http://nia.nih.gov) updated November 2009, accessed December 2011.

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