

# A Feel-Good Guide to Primary Care

From Oak Street Health



# Finding the Primary Care Doctor That's Right for You

Few things in life are more personal than your health, that's why finding the right primary care doctor is so important. If you're looking for a new physician, here are some important questions to ask yourself to make sure they're a fit for you.

Start by thinking about what you want and need from your primary care doctor.

- Would you prefer a female or male doctor?
- How far are you willing to travel to see your doctor?
- Do you have any chronic conditions that you prefer the doctor specialize in?
- Will this doctor fit into your schedule? (Do they have same day/next day appointments or a 24/7 patient support line?)
- Would you prefer a [primary care doctor](#) who specializes in people in your age group?
- Does the doctor you're considering take your insurance?

Think you may have found someone? Call their office with a few questions to see if the doctor's a good fit for you.

- Does the doctor typically discuss options with patients, or do they prefer to direct decisions on care without much input?
- Does this practice provide after-hours and emergency care?
- Does this practice offer patient transportation?
- Does this practice take my insurance?
- Does this doctor specialize in a particular type of care?

Once you've chosen a primary care doctor, be sure to start by covering the basics with them.

- How often should I come in for a check-up?
- Which health screenings are recommended for me?
- Am I up-to-date on all of my vaccinations?
- Can you help me to set some health goals?
- Am I at a good weight for my height and age?
- What can I do to stay active and healthy?

## Get the Care You Deserve

Experience the Oak Street Health difference: personalized primary care for older adults, and the kind of preventive care you need to stay healthy and live life more fully.

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# How to Make the Most of Your Doctor's Visit

Whether it's your first appointment or your annual checkup, planning for your doctor's visit can make it better. Here are tips to help you prep for your visit.

## Getting Ready for Your Appointment - Checklist:

### Plan Ahead So You Arrive Early

In order to have as much time as possible with your doctor, try to arrive early to avoid feeling rushed during your visit.

To help with this, be sure to record your appointment date and time on a calendar or in a planner so you can make it part of your schedule.

### Request Accommodations

Before your appointment, it's important to think through any special accommodations you might need, such as handicap parking or assistance, the help of an interpreter or translator, etc. Then, be sure to call the office ahead of time so they can arrange everything for your visit.

### Be Sure They Take Your Insurance

When it comes to medical expenses, insurance is a game-changer. Before confirming your doctor's appointment, it's important to be sure the office accepts your primary insurance. That way you can avoid extra charges or fees for physicians that aren't in your network. Oak Street Health locations accept a wide range of insurance carriers and have a Care Team of experts to walk you through your insurance benefits.

Be sure to bring your insurance cards to the appointment along with your ID so the office can scan your cards and bill you correctly.

### Map Your Trip

Before making an appointment, it's important to see where the doctor's office is in relation to your home. Map how far it is to drive to the office or which public transportation is available to take you there. Additionally, many patients are eligible for transportation services to and from their doctor's office; be sure to ask if this service is available to you.

### Make a List of Questions/Concerns

When you do actually see your doctor, it can be a bit overwhelming and easy to forget all of the questions or concerns you have. To avoid this, it can help to make a list of questions, comments, or concerns you want to address with them. Then, during your visit, you can simply refer to the list to make sure you cover everything you want to.

# What to Bring to Your Appointment - Checklist:

## ❑ **Bring Items For the Waiting Room**

At times, you may have to wait to see your doctor. To help pass the time, it's good to bring a few things with you to keep you occupied. You may also want to bring a sweater with you, since waiting and examination rooms are often a bit chilly.

## ❑ **Bring Test Results With You**

When establishing a relationship with a new doctor or provider, it's especially important to bring printouts of prior medical test results and lab work to your visit. Don't leave anything out; instead, let the doctor decide what's relevant or not so they have the broadest possible understanding of your medical history.

## ❑ **Gather Family Medical Records**

Family medical history can be a big factor in your health and well-being. Gather family medical records or put together a list of family health conditions to share with your doctor. Certain conditions may be genetic, so knowing your family's medical history can help you avoid similar health issues in the future.

## ❑ **Make a List of Past and Current Medications**

Make a list for your doctor of any past or current medications, even if they're over-the-counter drugs. This list should include dosage levels and frequency. If you take multiple medications, bring the bottles or packages in with you, even if they're expired or empty. Having all your medications on hand lets the doctor check for duplicates, see if you need any refills, and help you organize and optimize the medicines you're taking.

## ❑ **Be Honest About Your Medications**

It's important to be honest about which medications you're on, why you're on them, and how often you're actually taking them because it can have a real impact on your healthcare. Don't be afraid to share concerns, ask questions, or talk about side effects you have surrounding any medications you're on or anything that's been recommended for you.

## ❑ **Make a List of Past and Current Doctors**

Before your doctor's visit, make a list of past and current doctors and bring it with you. If possible, include their contact information so the doctor you're visiting can reach out to them and coordinate the best possible care for you.

## ❑ **Share Any Allergies, Prior Surgeries, or Current Medical Conditions**

Tell your doctor about any allergies you have, including food, seasonal, or medicine-related allergies. They can impact your daily health and influence which medications you can take. Likewise, be sure to make your doctor aware of any prior surgeries, visits to the emergency room, and medical incidents or conditions you've had or have so they have a full understanding of your medical history.

## ❑ **Share Any Current Medical Issues**

Anything new to report? If you've experienced any new medical issues since your last visit, it's important to make notes about the problem and share them at your upcoming appointment.

## What to Bring to Your Appointment - Checklist: (Continued)

### **Bring Along Any Health or Fitness Trackers**

If you use any sort of tracking mechanism as part of your daily routine, be sure to bring it with you to your appointment. Examples include fitness watches, glucometers, blood sugar logs, symptom trackers, blood pressure logs, food logs, etc.

### **Bring Along Emergency Contact Information**

It's important that your care team has your emergency contact information. Be sure to write down and share the names, phone numbers, addresses, and emails for any family members, friends, attorneys, and others to contact in the event of a medical emergency.

### **Have a Loved One Join You**

Sometimes doctor's appointments can be a little overwhelming. Having a loved one join you is the perfect way to feel supported and comfortable during your visit. This can be a family member, friend, caretaker, healthcare aid, or anyone else you feel comfortable with. Plus, having them in the room gives you an extra set of ears to help follow what the doctor is saying.

### **Bring a Note-Taking Device**

Whether it's a physical notepad or the notes section of your smartphone, it's always a good idea to bring along something to take notes with. Copying down the doctor's answers to your questions and concerns as well as test results and readings can help you understand and process everything later.

## Things to Focus on During the Appointment - Checklist:

### ☐ **Be as Relaxed as Possible**

Many patients experience what's known as 'white-coat stress' where their blood pressure becomes slightly elevated due to nervousness about seeing a doctor. White-coat stress can impact your test results and readings, so here are some ways to calm your nerves before your appointment:

- Breathing exercises
- Taking a walk
- Listening to calming music
- Journaling about your thoughts
- Sipping on a warm, decaffeinated drink
- Participating in yoga, tai chi, or meditation
- Herbal remedies; e.g., soothing essential oils, sprays, or lotions

### ☐ **Don't Hide Anything**

It's absolutely crucial for your relationship with your doctor to be based on honesty. Your doctor is there to help you and protect your health and well-being, so it's important to be honest with them so they can fully understand how you're feeling.

### ☐ **Be Sure About Next Steps**

Before leaving, it's important to check with your doctor and the office staff about follow-up tasks such as:

- Prescription Refills
- Outcomes of Test Results
- Next Appointment Details

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