

A Primary Care Physician: Your Partner in Health



When it comes to your health, one of the most important things you can do is establish a good relationship with a primary care physician (PCP). PCPs not only provide you with basic medical care, they also help you better manage your health and any health conditions you are facing.

Some health insurance plans require that you choose a PCP to manage your care. The PCP would coordinate your care when you are sick or in the hospital and would coordinate with your insurance plan as well. In other words, your PCP is a partner you can count on to help you with anything and everything related to your health and well-being.

It's important for you to play an active role in this partnership with your PCP. Here are some things you can do:

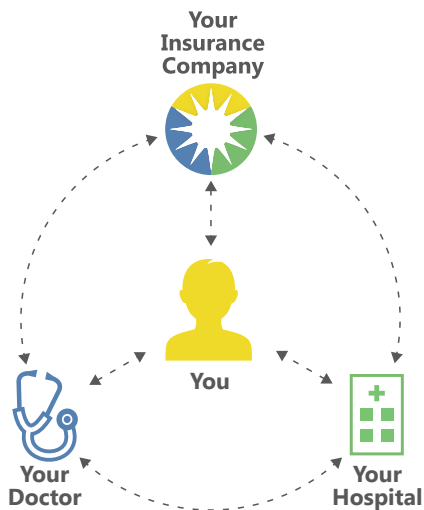
- Schedule a complete check up with your PCP every year
- Prepare fully for your PCP appointment using the checklist on the last page of this document
- Ask your doctor which preventive health screenings you need
- Receive any recommended vaccines

You can count on your PCP to:

- Help ensure you get the necessary screenings, tests and care that keep you well
- Help you manage and control any chronic health conditions
- Help diagnose you when you are sick and work with you to determine the best treatment
- Coordinate your care when you are sick or in the hospital to ensure you get the best treatment possible

If you have a health issue that may require a specialist, your PCP will help you find the right doctor to diagnose or treat you. Your PCP will work with that doctor to make sure you get the care you need. Since this is such an important part of a PCP's role, your health insurance plan may require you to get a referral from your PCP before seeing a specialist to make sure you are seeing the right doctor for your specific needs.

Although people often think of referrals as permission slips, they actually allow your PCP to help you better manage your healthcare. Without a referral, your PCP and specialist may not communicate with each other and may not know what the other is doing. This can lead to duplicative testing, which can cost you time and money. Referrals are a way to make sure you have a team of physicians talking about how to get you better. They allow your PCP to serve as your extra set of eyes, making sure you make the best medical decisions possible.



Quick Tips to Make the Most of Your Next PCP Appointment

Making the most of the time you have with your PCP is an important part of staying well. If you are sick when visiting your doctor, it can make it hard to remember to ask important questions and fully understand all that your doctor is telling you. Here are some suggestions that can help make your time with your PCP even more valuable.



Make a list of your questions and concerns.

Talking about your health means sharing information about how you are physically, emotionally and mentally. Think about how you feel in each of these categories and take detailed notes to share with your doctor. If you've had an odd ache or pain throughout the day, write it down. Your time with your doctor is about more than just the immediate issue (a sinus infection, cold, etc.)—it's about your overall health. Note things that seem different or "off," and discuss them with your PCP.

If you're experiencing new symptoms, here are questions to ask yourself:

- Are the symptoms constant? If not, when do I experience them?
- Does anything I do make the symptoms better? Or worse?
- Do the symptoms affect my daily activities? Which ones? How?

Bring information about your medications.

It is possible for medicines to interact and cause unpleasant and sometimes dangerous side effects. For this reason, it's important for your doctor to know about all the medicines you take, including over-the-counter medicines, herbal remedies and supplements. Make a list with the dosage of each item or bring all the items with you to your appointment. Don't forget about eye drops, vitamins or laxatives.



Discuss your lifestyle and habits.

To provide the best care, your PCP must understand you as a person and know what your life is like. Be open and honest. Discuss matters such as where you live, what you eat, how you sleep, daily activities, and if you've noticed changes in your appetite, weight, sleep or energy level. It will help your doctor fully understand your medical conditions and recommend the best treatment choices. The more you share with your doctor, the more he or she can help!



Know what your goals are for your health and ask your PCP how to achieve them.

It's not uncommon to battle multiple health conditions at once. High blood pressure, arthritis, diabetes, asthma — you name it. A lot of the time, one of those conditions may be making your day-to-day life especially difficult. Emphasize what condition in particular you'd like to manage better or eliminate all together, and work with your PCP to come up with a plan.

Take notes.

Write down what your PCP is telling you so that you can refer back to those notes later — especially when discussing treatment plans. How often were you supposed to check your blood pressure? Are you supposed to call if your blood pressure gets above a certain number? All these things are easy to forget after an appointment, so it never hurts to write them down.



Bring a family member or trusted friend.

If you're really not feeling well, you may want to consider bringing a family member or trusted friend with you to the appointment. You will appreciate having someone who can help take notes and ask questions to make sure you get all the information you need.

Ask your PCP to write down instructions for you.

If you're confused about anything, or worry you may forget something, don't be afraid to ask your PCP to write out what was covered in the appointment. Your PCP is there to help you get well and stay healthy.



Choosing the right Medicare insurance plan is a big part of taking care of your health. Choosing a trusted PCP as your health partner is the next important step to ensure you are getting the best coordination and outcomes possible.

Make the Most of Your Next PCP Appointment

Print this checklist to prepare for your appointment, and take it with you to the doctor's office. Take notes or ask your PCP to write down instructions for you.

You may want to consider bringing a family member or trusted friend with you to the appointment.



Make a list of your questions and concerns.



Bring information about your medications.

Make sure to include all your medicines: prescription drugs, over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, eye drops, etc.



Discuss your lifestyle and habits.



What are your health goals? Ask your PCP how to achieve them.
