

How To Choose A Pediatrician



When seeking the best medical care for your children, where should you turn? Most parents rely on a pediatrician, a medical doctor (M.D., D.O.) who specializes in the care of children. Pediatricians have special training in the health and illnesses of youngsters through the age of adolescence, and most are certified by the American Board of Pediatrics after passing a comprehensive examination covering all areas of health related to infants, children, and young adults.

By your child's middle years, you probably have already found a pediatrician with whom you are happy. However, the occasion may arise where you need to find a new doctor—perhaps you have moved to a new city or your pediatrician has retired.

In circumstances like these, try to obtain a referral from your present pediatrician. He or she may know a colleague in the city where you are moving, or one who is taking over the retiree's practice. Friends and family members might also recommend one or more pediatricians for you to consider.

There are other good sources of names of qualified pediatricians:

- The American Academy of Pediatrics and HealthyChildren.org can supply you with names of board-certified pediatricians in your community through the **Find a Pediatrician** tool.
- Most local/county medical societies provide referral services to pediatricians in their area who are taking new patients.
- If you are located near a major medical center, community hospital, or teaching hospital, contact its department of pediatrics for the names of doctors in your area.

Interviewing Pediatricians

With a list of doctors in hand, call the office of each. Explain that you are looking for a pediatrician for your child, and inquire about the doctor's background and training, as well as general office procedures. If you are impressed with what you hear, arrange for an interview during which you can meet the doctor and ask some additional questions. It may be more convenient to do this interview by telephone. Here is some key information you might inquire about and consider during this first meeting:

- What medical school did the pediatrician attend, and where did he or she undergo postgraduate and residency training? (Medical directories in many public libraries—such as the Directory of Medical Specialists and the American Medical Directory—can also help answer these questions.)
- What are the doctor's present hospital appointments? If it becomes necessary for your youngster to be hospitalized, where would he be admitted?
- Is the pediatrician's office conveniently located? Is it easily accessible by automobile or public transportation?
- Are the office hours convenient for your own schedule? If you are a working parent, you may desire evening or weekend hours.

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- What is the doctor's policy on taking and returning phone calls? Is there a nurse in the office who can answer routine questions?
- Is the doctor in a group practice with other physicians? Does another physician cover for the doctor at times? Who handles phone calls when the office is closed or during vacations?
- Do you sense a genuine interest by the doctor in the problems of your child, including particular health disorders he may have?
- Do both the physician and the office staff appear amicable and courteous? Do they demonstrate compassion and patience? Or do you feel rushed in the office, as though the doctor is eager to move on to the next patient?
- How are visits for acute illnesses handled? Can you make an appointment on short notice if your child needs to see the pediatrician because of a sore throat or an infection, for example?
- Does the doctor communicate clearly, using layman's language (not medical jargon) to explain illnesses and treatments, and does the doctor make an effort to ensure that all your questions are answered?
- What are the doctor's usual fees for sick visits, routine examinations, and immunizations? What is the office policy regarding the processing of insurance forms?
- In what managed-care programs does the doctor participate?
- If your child should ever develop a complex illness that necessitates the care of one or more specialists, will your pediatrician coordinate care among all the doctors providing treatment?