

Before your visit:

Tips for patients seeking medical care



Research
your options



Establish
*open
communication*



Advocate
*for yourself and
others*

What is the purpose of this guide?

This guide shares some ways to ensure you receive appropriate care. The information provided here is meant to help you:

- *Learn important information about your physician*
- *Find out about your medical conditions and appropriate treatments*
- *Advocate for yourself and loved ones*
- *Understand the importance of having a doctor you trust*

Who is this guide for?

This guide is designed to help all patients. This guide can help people who are:

- *Looking for a new doctor, surgeon, or other specialist*
- *Looking for more information about their doctor*
- *Parents and caregivers*
- *Professional patient advocates*

Research

your options



- Selecting a Doctor
- Informing Expectations & Choices



Selecting a Doctor



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Not everyone has the option to choose their doctor ahead of time, or there may be limited choices in some cases. Even if your choices of a healthcare provider are limited, the information provided here can still help you by informing you what to expect during an appointment, or where to find more information. It may encourage you to ask questions. When possible, research a physician's history before you make your first appointment for yourself or a loved one. Here are some options to help you with researching:



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1

**BOARD
CERTIFICATION**

2

**STATE MEDICAL
BOARDS**

3

**ONLINE
RESOURCES**

1

BOARD CERTIFICATION



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While not all doctors are board certified...

Board certified doctors are required to meet nationally recognized standards that are above what is required for basic medical licensure. However, just because a doctor is not certified does not mean they are less able or qualified to care for you.



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The American Board of Medical Specialties offers a website called [Certification Matters](#), where you can enter your physician's information and find out if your doctor is board certified.



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Some state medical boards...

Post records of disciplinary cases online. You can check if a physician has malpractice claims or if they have been investigated for sexual misconduct, substance abuse, negligence or other wrongdoing.

Keep in mind however that often meetings in which physicians are reprimanded are confidential and not made public.

Federation
of State
Medical
Boards

See the [Federation of State Medical Boards website](#) for information on how to get in contact with your State Medical Board.



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A Well-Guided Internet Search...

Is often helpful in finding news or police reports, court records, or even social media posts that patients have written to inform others about quality of care.



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Health Grades

[HealthGrades.com](https://www.healthgrades.com) provides information about physicians, including board certification, disciplinary actions, patient reviews, and more.

Insurance providers

Insurance companies have websites that can tell you whether a physician, drug, or treatment is covered by your insurance. Many offer patient reviews for physicians in their network.

Open Payments Data

Manufacturers of drugs, medical devices, or biologics are required to disclose their financial relationships with physicians. The [Open Payments Data website](https://www.openpayments.gov) allows patients to see how much money a physician has accepted from corporations in the pharmaceutical and medical device industry. Feel free to ask your doctor about these relationships if you think it could affect your care.

Informing Expectations & Choices



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For some procedures or treatments...

Educational websites can tell you when and why doctors recommend them. Here are some resources that can provide you with trustworthy health information.

But be careful!

There are countless websites offering health advice online, many of which contain information that is outdated, inaccurate, or unproven. Online resources are not appropriate for diagnosing illness, and they should never replace a visit with a doctor.



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Choosing Wisely

Created by the American Board of Internal Medicine Foundation, the [Choosing Wisely website](#) has many patient resources to guide choices on a variety of medical procedures, treatments, and exams—including pelvic exams and opioid use after surgery.

Mayo Clinic

Mayo Clinic is a nonprofit organization dedicated to clinical practice, research, and education in healthcare. The [Mayo Clinic website](#) provides detailed information about many diseases, procedures, and treatments that can help inform your expectations before an appointment.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

The CDC is a federal agency committed to health promotion, prevention, and preparedness in the U.S. The [CDC website](#) provides guidelines and recommendations for many drugs and procedures that can help you make educated choices about your care.

Get a Second Opinion



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Talking to more than one doctor can be a good idea...

When you are not clear about your options, your diagnosis, or how well an expensive test or treatment will work.

Don't worry about offending your doctor—second opinions are part of standard medical practice. Your doctor will want you to have the best information to make your decisions.



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- Asking Questions





Research

The Importance of Trust



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TRUST
*is the foundation of
your relationship
with your doctor.*

When you trust your physician,
there are better health
outcomes for you, your family,
your community,
and the greater public.



Personal Health Benefits

Patients who trust their doctors are more likely to take their medications as directed or follow a doctor's advice about things like exercise, flu shots, or smoking cessation



Public Health Benefits

When groups of patients have more trust, they are diagnosed and receive care sooner because they are more comfortable seeking care and getting tested



Benefits to Science & Medicine

High levels of physician trust also encourage patients like you to participate in research that leads to breakthroughs in treating diseases such as cancer or diabetes



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Asking Questions

If you have questions or concerns about when an exam, procedure, or drug is appropriate, ask.



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If you don't understand or aren't comfortable with your physician's recommendation, ask to speak to a nurse or other healthcare professional in the office before agreeing to the exam or procedure. Some people may feel shy or nervous about asking a question, but as a patient, you have the right to ask questions about things you do not understand.

Agency for Healthcare & Research Quality

If you're not sure what questions to ask your doctor, the [AHRQ website](#) can provide templates for the kinds of questions you should ask your doctor before, during, and after your appointment. It can even produce a list of questions for you after you enter some more detailed information about your appointment.



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- Requesting or Serving as a Chaperone
- Responding to Unacceptable Treatment





Research

Requesting or Serving as a Chaperone



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When a doctor needs to perform a physical exam...

You may request that a chaperone be present, even if you have a loved one with you. A chaperone is an individual whose role is to independently observe the exam or procedure and to assist the doctor-patient relationship. A chaperone may be a trained medical professional or a trusted loved one of the patient. Having a chaperone may make you feel more comfortable or prevent misunderstandings. A doctor should not refuse your request for a chaperone.



Image Source: National Cancer Institute



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When acting as a chaperone for another person...

Make sure you understand what is routine and appropriate during intimate examinations. If the physician does not provide an explanation about what is occurring during the exam and why you have a right to ask. Patients should always be given an explanation for what is occurring and why during physical examinations. They should also be given privacy while undressing and provided with gowns or draping. Chaperones should reassure the patient if needed and respect the patient's confidentiality.



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Responding to Abuse



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Some patients have received unacceptable or illegal treatment from their healthcare provider. This includes cases of abuse, assault, or fraud. Experiencing abuse by a healthcare provider is rare— more than likely, your doctor is a good doctor. However, if you suspect or have experienced mistreatment, there are resources available to help you address the situation:



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Patient Advocates

Are healthcare professionals who act as a spokesperson for patients and help guide them through the healthcare system. Many hospitals and nonprofit organizations employ patient advocates who can help you make educated health decisions, and may help you find financial, legal, and social support. The [Patient Advocate Foundation website](#), or hotline (800.532.5274) can provide more information about what a patient advocate can do for you, and connect you with patient advocacy services.

State Medical Boards

Are responsible for investigating and enforcing consequences for physicians who fail to meet the ethical standards of the profession. Reporting serious lapses in professionalism, such as abusive behavior or assault, is the best option to ensure a bad-acting doctor is reprimanded and prevented from mistreating future patients. Contact information for your state medical board is listed on the [Federation of State Medical Boards website](#).

Resources Cited

Selecting a Doctor

- The American Board of Medical Specialties offers a website [Certification Matters](#), where you can enter your physician's information and find out if your doctor is board certified.
- Contact information for your state medical board is listed on the [Federation of State Medical Boards website](#).
- [HealthGrades.com](#) provides information about physicians, including board certification, disciplinary actions, patient reviews, and more.
- As part of the Sunshine Act, the Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services offers their [Open Payments Data](#) website, where patients can see how much money a physician has accepted from corporations in the pharmaceutical & medical device industry.

Informing Expectations & Choices

- Created by the ABIM Foundation, the [Choosing Wisely website](#) has many patient resources to guide choices on a variety of medical procedures, treatments, and exams—including pelvic exams and opioid use after surgery.
- The [Mayo Clinic website](#) provides detailed information about many diseases, procedures, and treatments that can help inform your expectations before an appointment.
- The [CDC website](#) provides guidelines and recommendations for many drugs and procedures that can help you made educated choices about your care.

Asking Questions

- If you're not sure what questions to ask your doctor, the [AHRQ website](#) can provide templates for the kinds of questions you should ask your doctor before, during, and after your appointment.

Responding to Mistreatment

- The [Patient Advocate Foundation website](#) can provide more information about what a patient advocate can do for you, and connect you with patient advocacy services. You can also call the Patient Advocate Foundation at (800) 532-5274.
- Reporting serious lapses in professionalism, such as abusive behavior or assault, is the best option to ensure a bad-acting doctor is reprimanded and prevented from mistreating future patients. Contact information for your state medical board is listed on the [Federation of State Medical Boards website](#).



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