

Finding a New Physician

Choosing the right health-care provider for your needs is important in receiving good medical care.

The best time to find a health-care provider is before you really need one.

The process of finding the right physician for you begins with asking questions and gathering information. To help you along the way, you might consider the following.

Step One. Prioritize the following to help decide what is most important to you.

- Insurance plan is accepted by physician
- Convenience of the office – locations, office hours
- Accessibility – ease of parking, is it a separate clinic or within a hospital?
- Availability – how quickly can you get in to see the physician or speak to a person on the phone?
- Physician admits patients to your preferred hospital
- Training & qualifications – Board Certified, years of experience
- Personal characteristics – age, gender, languages spoken

Step Two. Get names of potential physicians. Ask family, friends, and neighbors.

Ask other physicians, nurses, pharmacists, therapists, or social workers.

Call a physician referral line run by your insurance company or local hospital

Step Three. Interview up to 3 physicians. The office staff can answer the questions if you cannot speak with the physician. Here are suggested questions:

- Does the physician take new patients?
- Does the physician take my insurance plan, Medicare, or Medicaid?
- Where is the clinic located?
- Does the physician admit patients to my preferred hospital?
- What are the office hours and how can I reach the physician after hours?
- Who handles questions by phone?
- Who sees the patients (physician, nurse practitioner, physician assistant)?
- Does the physician have the experience with my health issues?
- Is the physician Board Certified (in what specialty)? Other credentials?
- How long does it take to get an appointment for a routine visit? What about an urgent visit?

Step Four. Be prepared for your first visit:

- Bring your health history or medical records
- Bring all of your prescription and non-prescription medication bottles
- Bring your insurance card and emergency contact information
- Tell your physician about your main health concern first
- Be honest about your personal information (such as exercise, drugs, sexuality, alcohol, and smoking)
- Bring completed health forms sent in advance by the physician's office
- Bring along a support person and paper and a pen to take notes!

Compiled by the Senior Safety Subcommittee of the Breakthrough Coalition, St. Louis, MO

Whether to See a Geriatrician is an Old-Age Question

By Dr. John Morley *



As baby boomers get older, geriatricians are getting busier helping patients take control of their health to stay vital.

How do you know it's time for a geriatric assessment? As Charles Dickens pointed out in his novel "Martin Chuzzlewit," "prevention is better than cure." If you are 70 or older, a visit to a geriatrician may identify problems, which if treated early, can result in a more successful aging process.

Here are some other reasons to see a geriatrician who specializes in caring for older adults:

9 or more medications — The most common and easily remedied reason for problems with aging is over-treatment by physicians. As we age, physiological changes interact with medications to produce side effects. Many older patients take multiple medications prescribed by different specialists, and drug interactions can lead to major problems. A geriatrician can help manage and keep track of all your medical care.

Tiredness and weight loss — Frequent fatigue is cornerstone of the frailty syndrome. This common cycle causes people to feel weak so they stop being active, which makes them more frail. Being unable to walk a block or climb a flight of stairs are other indicators of poor health. Weight loss of five pounds or more is another important danger signal in older individuals.

Memory problems — This is perhaps the most common reason to see a geriatrician. For approximately 1 in 10 people, the cause can be reversed, particularly when the problem is identified early. Depression sometimes causes memory problems, deteriorating health and weight loss. It can complicate recovery from a heart attack or hip fracture. A geriatrician can prescribe medication to treat depression.

Falling — Any older person who has two or more falls should visit a geriatrician, who may suggest solutions to the problem.

Routine activities — If you have problems sleeping or with daily activities such as paying your bills, bathing, preparing meals, taking medications or with your sex life, consider seeing a geriatrician.

And, finally, if you are unhappy with the answers you are getting from your regular physician, a visit to a geriatrician may be very helpful.

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Question: Why should an older adult use a geriatrician?

ANSWER: "Not every older adult would require a geriatrician (specialist..not addressing primary care..). However, an older adult that has multiple medical problems such as memory loss, depression, falls, incontinence, polypharmacy may benefit by having a specialist such as a geriatrician that has additional expertise in managing common syndromes in late life."



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Talking With Your Health Care Provider

What to Ask... What to Share... and How to Follow up

Talking with your health care provider is one of the most important parts of getting good health care. By health care provider, we mean any health care professional who prescribes or recommends treatments for you.

*A good relationship with your health care provider is a partnership, with both partners working together to improve or maintain your health. You have a certain responsibility to take an active role in your health by communicating with your health care team. **Speak up** if you feel uncomfortable or rushed during an appointment. **Tell someone** about specific worries. **Stay focused** on the purpose of your visit. Use this brochure to help guide you.*

STEP 1

Get ready for your appointment.

- Make a list of your worries and questions that you want to talk about with your health care provider; put this list in order of importance.
- Be prepared to update your health care provider on any new important information.
- Bring your glasses and hearing aid, if you use them; let your health care provider know if you have a hard time hearing or seeing; bring along your cane or walker.
- Bring along a family member or friend to keep your visit focused and remind you of things you wanted to talk about.
- Bring along all of your medications (including items you buy without a prescription).
- Be honest about your goals for your health, activity level and lifestyle; this might affect choice of treatment.
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STEP 2

Share information with your health care provider.

*Update this person about things that have happened since your last visit. **Be honest about:***

- Signs and symptoms of your condition.
- Your lifestyle and habits (alcohol use, diet, smoking), activities you participate in, and other personal information (such as sexuality, incontinence, depression, anxiety).
- All of the medications you take, including nonprescription items and herbal products.
- Concerns about side effects, cost, or treatment.

STEP 3

Get information from your health care provider.

- Ask questions when you do not know the meaning of a word or when instructions are not clear.
- Take notes; do not try to remember everything.
- Ask for written information, instructions, brochures, videotapes.
- Find out where you can get more information about the treatment (the Internet, public library, nonprofit or government agencies, etc.).
- Ask about the benefits of the recommended treatment.
- Ask about the side effects, disadvantages, and length of the recommended treatment.
- Ask about costs and insurance coverage.
- Find out if there is more than one treatment choice, especially if you have concerns.
- Consider getting a second opinion, if appropriate.
- Ask what would happen if you choose **no** therapy.
- Ask about prevention or lifestyle changes that can help improve or maintain your condition.
- Find out what follow-up is needed (tests, appointments).
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STEP 4

Follow up with your health care provider about the recommended treatment.

- Call if you have additional questions that you forgot to ask or if you do not understand something.
- Talk to other members of your health care team who might be able to take more time or offer additional information.
- Call to find out results of blood work or other tests.
- Call to schedule your next appointment, test, or procedure.
- If needed, make an appointment with another health care provider, for example a specialist, dietitian, or physical or occupational therapist.

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Hospice Patients' Bill of Rights

Patients have a right to be notified in writing of their rights and obligations before hospice care begins. Consistent with state laws, the patient's family or guardian may exercise the patient's rights when the patient is unable to do so. Hospice organizations have an obligation to protect and promote the rights of their patients, including the following:

Dignity and Respect

Patients and their hospice caregivers have a right to mutual respect and dignity. Caregivers are prohibited from accepting personal gifts and borrowing from patients/families/primary caregivers. In addition, patients have the right: to have relationships with hospice organizations that are based on honesty and ethical standards of conduct; to be informed of the procedures they can follow to lodge complaints with the hospice organization about the care that is (or fails to be) furnished and regarding a lack of respect for property (to lodge complaints call the hospice); to know about the disposition of such complaints; and to voice their grievances without fear of discrimination or reprisal for having done so.

Decision Making

Patients have the right: to be notified in writing of the care that is to be furnished, the types (disciplines) of caregivers who will furnish the care, and the frequency of the services that are proposed to be furnished; to be advised of any change in the plan of care before the change is made; to participate in the planning of the care and in planning changes in the care, and to be advised that they have the right to do so; to refuse services and to be advised of the consequences of refusing care; and to request a change in caregiver without fear of reprisal or discrimination. The hospice organization or the patient's physician may be forced to refer the patient to another source of care if the client's refusal to comply with the plan of care threatens to compromise the provider's commitment to quality care.

Privacy

Patients have the right: to confidentiality with regard to information about their health, social, and financial circumstances and about what takes place in the home; and to expect the hospice organization to release information only as consistent with its internal policy, required by law, or authorized by the client.

Financial

Patients have the right: to be informed of the extent to which payment may be expected from Medicare, Medicaid or any other payor known to the hospice organization; to be informed of any charges that will not be covered by Medicare; to be informed of the charges for which the patient may be liable; to receive this information, orally and in writing, within 15 working days of the date the hospice organization becomes aware of any changes in charges; to have access, on request, to all bills for service received, regardless of whether they are paid out of pocket or by another party; and to be informed of the hospice's ownership status and its affiliation with any entities to which the patient is referred.

Quality of Care

Patients have the right: to receive care of the highest quality; to be admitted by a hospice organization only if it is assured that all necessary palliative and supportive services will be provided to promote the physical, psychological, social, and spiritual well-being of the dying patient. An organization with less than optimal resources may, however, admit the patient if a more appropriate hospice organization is not available-but only after fully informing the client of its limitations and the lack of suitable alternative arrangements; and to be told what to do in the case of an emergency.

The hospice organization shall assure that: all medically related hospice care is provided in accordance with physician's orders and that a plan of care, which is developed by the patient's physician and the hospice interdisciplinary group in conjunction with the patient, specifies the services to be provided and their frequency and duration; and all medically related personal care is provided by an appropriately trained home care aide who is supervised by a nurse or other qualified hospice professional.

Reprinted from the Hospice Association of America

Tips for Choosing Home Health Care

Many older adults choose to age in their own home with the help of home care or supportive services.

This type of assistance can include: skilled medical care, personal care, housekeeping services, handyman services and more.

When shopping for assistance at home, it is important to determine what type of assistance the individual needs, such as physical assistance (bathing, dressing, hygiene, etc.), more home-related tasks (cleaning, cooking, shopping, etc.), or a combination of both. If you are unsure, agencies will provide an assessment during their first visit.

From that information, a care plan is developed detailing tasks to be performed prior to services beginning.

However, before reaching that point, you'll want to know more about the agency and its staff who will be in your home. Below are some questions for your consideration.

Questions to Ask

1. Is the agency Medicare approved?
2. How long has the agency been serving the community?
3. Does this agency give the services I need?
4. How are emergencies handled?
5. Is the agency's staff on duty 24 hours a day, seven days a week?
6. What will I be charged for services/supplies?
7. Will Medicare or Medicaid pay for the items I need?
8. How are my rights protected?
9. Can my family and I help decide my plan of care?
10. How far in advance do arrangements have to be made?
11. Does the agency teach family members about the type of care being given?
12. Who make sure that the home health care plan is being followed? Does the supervisor make regular visits to the home?
13. Who can I call if I have questions or complaints?
14. What happens if a home health agency staff person does not come when scheduled?
15. Will the agency be in regular contact with my doctor?
16. Is a free home health care consultation by a registered nurse offered prior to start of service?
17. Is a written job description provided for clients?
18. Does the aide have reliable transportation?
19. Does the agency provide a list of references for you to check the level of client satisfaction?
20. Are the employees bonded and insured?
21. Are the employees licensed to perform specialized medical care?
22. Will the agency offer services to fit the individual's needs?
23. What kind of training does the agency provide to employees?
24. Are the aides experienced or certified?
25. How are the aides recruited?

Eight Steps to Selecting an Adult Day Care Center

Step #1 - Determine Your Needs

What specific services are needed for the older person?

- A safe, secure environment?
- Social activities?
- Assistance with eating, walking, toileting, medicines?
- Therapies - physical, speech, occupational?
- Health monitoring - blood pressures, food or liquid intake, weight?
- Nutritious meals & snacks? • Special diet?
- Exercise? • Mental stimulation?
- Personal care - bathing, shampoos, shaving?
- What do you, the caregiver, need?
- Occasional free time?
- Coverage while working?
- Transportation?
- Support?
- Assistance in planning for care?

Step #2 - Finding Adult Day Centers

Identify services in your area

Step #3 - Call First

Call adult day centers and ask for a flier or brochure, eligibility criteria, a monthly activity calendar, a monthly menu and application procedures.

Step #4 - Know What to Ask

Look for the following information in the material received:

- Owner or sponsoring agency • Years of operation
- License or certification (If required in your state)
- Hours of operation • Days open • Transportation
- Cost - Hourly or daily charge, other charges, financial assistance
- Conditions accepted - such as memory loss, limited mobility, incontinence • Staff credentials
- Number of staff per participant
- Activities provided - Is there variety and choice of individual and group activities?
- Menu - appeal, balance

Step #5 - Pay a Visit

After reviewing materials, make an appointment to visit two or more centers that might meet your needs. The following site visit checklist will help you decide which day center is the right one for you.

- Did you feel welcomed?
- Did someone spend time finding out what you want and need?
- Did someone clearly explain what services and activities the center provides?
- Did they present information about staffing, program procedures, costs and what they expect of caregivers?
- Was the facility clean, pleasant and free of odor?
- Were the building and the rooms wheelchair accessible?
- Was there sturdy, comfortable furniture? Loungers for relaxation? Chairs with arms?
- Is there a quiet place for conferences?
- Is there a place to isolate sick persons?
- Did you see cheerful faces on staff and participants?
- Do volunteers help?
- Are participants involved in planning activities or making other suggestions?

Step #6 - Check References

Talk to two or three people who have used the center you are considering & ask for their opinions.

Step #7 - Try it Out

Select a day center: Try it for three to five days. It sometimes takes several visits for new participants to feel comfortable in a new setting and with a new routine. If you have questions or are experiencing any problems, ask for a conference. Staff may have suggestions to make the transition easier both at home and at the day center.

Step #8 - Take care of yourself

Relax. Your loved one is being well cared for. Remember, your loved one may not be able to recall all the activities enjoyed during the day. The staff will gladly provide the missing details. The day center staff is there for you, too.

Adapted from the National Adult Day Services Association (NADSA)

Home Safety Evaluation



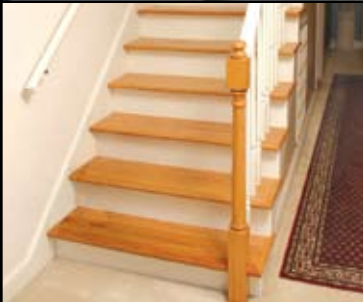
Windows and Doors

1. Are windows/ doors easy to open and close?
2. Are the locks sturdy and easy to operate?
3. Are the doors wide enough for a walker or wheelchair?
4. Are the door thresholds too high?
5. Is there space to maneuver while opening and closing the doors?
6. Does the front door have a view panel? Is it at the proper height for you?



Floors

1. Is the surface safe and nonslip?
2. Are there scatter rugs or doormats that may be dangerous?
3. Are there changes in levels? If so, are they clearly marked?



Steps, Stairs, and Walkways

1. Are they in good repair?
2. Do they have smooth, safe surfaces?
3. Are there handrails on both sides of the stairway?
4. Is there grasping space for both knuckles and fingers on the railings?
5. Are the stair treads deep enough for your whole foot?
6. Are there any hazardous open risers on the stairs?
7. Would a ramp be feasible in any of these areas should the need arise?



Appliances, Kitchen, and Bath

1. Is the arrangement convenient and safe?
2. Can the oven and refrigerator be opened easily?
3. Are the stove controls easy to use? Are they clearly marked?
4. Is the counter height/ depth convenient for you? Can you sit while working?
5. Are the cabinet knobs easy to use?
6. Are the faucets easy to use?
7. Do you have convenience items such as a garbage disposal? Trash compactor? Hand-held shower head?
8. Can you get in and out of the shower with ease?
9. Do you have a bath or shower seat?
10. Are there grab bars where needed?
11. Is the hot water heater regulated to prevent scalding?



Storage

1. Is the storage located conveniently?
2. Is the storage adequate and usable?
3. Can you easily reach closet items?
4. Have you maximized your storage space with innovative products?



Electrical Outlets, Switches, and Alarms

1. Are the outlets/ switches easy to turn off and on?
2. Are the outlets properly grounded to prevent electrical shock?
3. Are the extension cords in good condition? Are they needed?
4. Do you have smoke detectors in all of the necessary areas?
5. Do you have an alarm system?
6. Is the telephone readily available for emergencies?
7. Is the telephone equipped for hearing enhancement if necessary?
8. Can you hear the doorbell in every part of the house?