



# Choosing a Pediatrician

Are you expecting a baby or do you have children? If the answer is yes and you don't have a doctor, there are many reasons why you should consider choosing a pediatrician.

Read on for information from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) about the benefits of choosing a pediatrician and how to choose a pediatrician and about why regular well-child visits are important.

## Benefits of Choosing a Pediatrician

Children's health care needs are different from those of adults. Pediatricians are trained to care for the special health care needs of children and to prevent and manage health problems in newborns, infants, children, teens, and young adults. A special bond is often developed over the years between the child, parents, and pediatrician.

## Pediatricians Are Devoted to Children's Health

To become a pediatrician, a doctor must take special courses for 3 or more years after medical school. This is called *residency*. After residency, a doctor usually takes a long, detailed test given by the American Board of Pediatrics (ABP). By passing the test, the doctor becomes a board-certified pediatrician. He or she gets a certificate that you may see displayed at the office. The doctor can then apply to become a fellow (or member) of the AAP and use the initials *FAAP* after his or her name. The AAP is a professional member organization of 66,000 pediatricians. Visit [www.AAP.org](http://www.AAP.org) for more information.

## Pediatricians Are Experts in Children's Health

Pediatricians are specially trained to treat your child and to manage your child's physical, emotional, and social health and well-being, including

- Growth and development
- Illnesses
- Nutrition
- Immunizations
- Injuries
- Physical fitness
- Behavior
- Emotional or family problems
- Learning and other school problems
- Preventing and dealing with drug use
- Puberty and other teen concerns
- TV, the Internet, and other media

## Pediatricians May Also

- Work with staff of child care centers, schools, and after-school programs, if your child has any health care needs during school.
- Refer your child to a pediatric medical subspecialist or pediatric surgical specialist, if your child needs additional care for complex health problems.

- Give advice about alternative, complementary, and integrative medicine and folk medicine and about which treatments or therapies are safe for children. It is important that you tell your pediatrician about all medicines and treatments your child receives.

## How to Choose a Pediatrician

- 1. Get referrals.** Ask parents you know and trust whether they have any recommendations. Your doctor or obstetrician may also have recommendations.

### Questions You May Ask...

- How does the doctor interact with children and their parents?
- Which staff members in the office answer parents' questions?
- How helpful and friendly is the office staff in person and on the phone?
- How long is the wait for a scheduled office visit?
- Can children who feel sick be seen on the same day? How does the office handle emergencies?
- Does the doctor communicate clearly to explain illnesses and treatments?

You may also find information on local pediatricians from a nearby hospital, a medical school, or your county medical society. Your health insurance provider may have more information about its approved network of doctors.

- 2. Do your research.** Before you ask any questions, find out whether the pediatrician is accepting new patients. If yes, check to see whether your insurance is accepted. Then write down the questions you want to ask. You may want to take notes for each doctor you contact.

### General Questions You May Ask...

- What are the office hours? Does the office have evening and weekend hours?
- Is emergency coverage available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week?
- When is the best time to call with routine questions?
- Does the office have an after-hours answering service?
- How does the office staff handle billing?
- How are insurance claims handled?
- How are referrals to other specialists handled?
- How are prescription refills handled?

### Questions About the Pediatrician You May Ask...

- Does the doctor have a subspecialty or an area of pediatric interest? If so, what is it?
- To what hospital does the doctor admit patients?
- Is the doctor board certified through the ABP?
- Is the doctor a FAAP? (See *AAP Find a Pediatrician Tool*.)
- Who will care for my child if my pediatrician is not available? Is he or she on staff at the same hospital?

## AAP Find a Pediatrician Tool

Find a pediatrician, pediatric medical subspecialist, or pediatric surgical specialist on the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) parenting Web site at [www.HealthyChildren.org/findapediatrician](http://www.HealthyChildren.org/findapediatrician).

**NOTE:** When choosing a pediatrician, look for the initials FAAP after his or her name (eg, Sarah H. Jones, MD, FAAP) so your child gets the best and most up-to-date care possible. FAAPs are

- Members (fellows) of the AAP
- Board certified in pediatrics
- Committed to lifelong learning
- Advocates for children and families
- Up-to-date on the latest in child health

**3. Make an appointment.** After you've chosen a pediatrician, you may schedule your child's first visit or request a "get acquainted" visit with the doctor and staff first, before deciding. Expectant parents may schedule a get-acquainted visit before their baby is born. The get-acquainted visit may or may not be covered by insurance.

**NOTE:** After your first visit with the pediatrician, ask yourself the following question: Does this pediatrician listen, answer questions, and seem interested? Above all, ask yourself if you like and trust this person. If your instincts say no, try another pediatrician.

## Benefits of Well-Child Visits

Regular well-child visits (health checkups) are important throughout childhood. These checkups ensure that children from birth to age 21

- Are developing and growing well
- Are up-to-date with their recommended immunizations to protect them from many serious diseases
- Continue to stay healthy and safe

Regular visits also create strong, trustworthy relationships between pediatrician, parent, and child. The best time to begin building a partnership between you and your child's pediatrician is before your child feels sick or needs a checkup for school.

## Recommended Well-Child Visits

The AAP recommends regular well-child visits at the following times:

- Before your baby is born (for first-time parents)
- Before your newborn leaves the hospital
- Within 3 to 5 days after birth and within 48 to 72 hours after leaving the hospital
- During the first year of life: visit by 4 weeks of age and also at 2, 4, 6, 9, and 12 months of age
- In early childhood: visit at 15, 18, 24, and 30 months of age as well as yearly visits from 3 through 4 years of age
- In middle childhood: yearly visits from 5 through 10 years of age
- In adolescence and early adulthood: yearly visits from 11 through 21 years of age until your child changes to an adult-oriented physician

Your pediatrician may recommend additional visits.

## From Your Doctor

American Academy of Pediatrics

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