

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information,
contact: Tara Solomon-Smith
Adult Development and Aging Agent, Wildcat Extension District
tsolomon@ksu.edu, 620-724-8233

Decisions About Your Doctor

We will all need to see a doctor at some point, most likely more than once in a year, no matter how healthy you are. Your primary care doctor is your first point of contact and often the ‘team leader’ in times of illness. I know it can be challenging in a rural area and with many community changes.

However, research shows that having a primary care doctor you feel comfortable with can be critical to your well-being. A 2005 paper by Johns Hopkins pediatrician Barbara Starfield, found that robust relationships with primary care providers help prevent illness and death and reduce health disparities.

So, it’s ok to take some action in your healthcare decisions! Here are some tips for finding a primary doctor that works best for you.

1. Figure out what type of patient you are.

Ask yourself exactly what you need from your doctor. Young, healthy patients, for example, may prioritize convenience. If you have a few medical problems and need to see specialists, find a primary care physician who can easily share electronic medical records with a hospital and specialty offices.

If you don't have insurance, don't give up! Check out a community health center near you to see about a sliding-scale fee.

2. Seek out a doctor who makes you feel comfortable.

It’s ok to trust your gut on this one. You should immediately feel at ease with your doctor. Good signs to look out for include a doctor who makes eye contact and who listens without interrupting. If the connection isn't there, you are entitled to shop around.

3. When you go to the doctor, go prepared.

Avoid that deer-in-the-headlights feeling when your doctor asks what brings you in. Perfect your "opening statement," a concise description of what's going on and how it affects your quality of life. Also, bring in your medications and paperwork from any other doctors or hospitals — that information can be critical to your health.

4. List and Prioritize Your Concerns

Make a list of what you want to discuss. For example, do you have a new symptom you want to ask the doctor about? Do you want to get a flu shot? Are you concerned about how a treatment is affecting your daily life?

If you have more than a few items to discuss, put them in order and ask about the most important ones first. Don't put off the things that are really on your mind until the end of your appointment—bring them up right away!

5. Consider Bringing a Family Member or Friend

Sometimes it is helpful to bring a family member or close friend with you. Let that person know in advance what you want from your visit. Your companion can remind you what you planned to discuss with the doctor if you forget. She or he can take notes for you and can help you remember what the doctor said.

6. You have a right to give your doctor feedback.

People sometimes hesitate to change doctors because they worry about hurting their doctor's feelings. But doctors understand that different people have different needs. They know it is important for everyone to have a doctor with whom they are comfortable.

Still struggling with the doctor decision? Consult reference sources such as the [American Medical Association's Doctor Finder website](#) and the [American Board of Medical Specialties' Certification Matters database](#). These websites don't recommend individual doctors, but they do provide a list of doctors you may want to consider. MedlinePlus, a website from the National Library of Medicine at NIH, has a [comprehensive list of directories](#), which may also be helpful. For a list of doctors who participate in Medicare, visit www.medicare.gov/physiciancompare. Information in this article is adapted from physician hosted podcast, Be A Powerful Patient and the National Institute of Health.

For more information, contact Tara Solomon-Smith, tsolomon@ksu.edu, or by calling 620-724-8233.

###

K - State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer