

5 reasons to have a primary care doctor

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by HealthPartners

1. You'll stay healthier

In a [10 year study](#), researchers found that greater access to primary care was directly related to a longer life expectancy. So why does having a primary care doctor make you healthier?

Patients who see a primary care doctor regularly stay up to date on their preventive care (immunizations, mammograms, colon cancer screenings) and often their chronic conditions (diabetes, high blood pressure) are better managed. Those patients are less likely to be hospitalized or have surgery, because if there's something wrong, it's caught earlier, which leads to better health outcomes.

2. You can lower your health care costs

Because preventive care is strongly tied to better health and lower costs, many preventive care services are completely covered by insurance – often with no copay. By visiting your primary care doctor for your routine physicals, screenings and immunizations, you're more likely to avoid costly prescriptions and care later on.

Think of the dentist. If you make a point to get your teeth cleaned every six months as recommended, the appointment is usually covered by insurance. But if you skip your cleanings for a year or two and wait until you have a toothache, you might find yourself with a bill for a root canal. Even though preventive care is usually covered, studies show that Americans are only getting about half of the preventive care they should. In addition to the health benefits, adults who have a primary care physician [experience 33 percent lower health care costs](#).

3. You'll save time

When you have primary care doctor you can save time by addressing multiple health needs in one appointment. Your doctor can often provide a checkup, screening and/or immunization in just one visit. Or maybe you went in for a physical, but also want to ask a question about something else. By taking full advantage of your primary care doctor's wide breadth of expertise, you can get your health questions answered – and in some cases, even receive treatment that day – without needing an additional appointment.

Doctors, physician assistants and nurse practitioners can all offer [primary care](#). Usually they practice internal medicine, family medicine or pediatrics.

4. They're your guide to the health care system

While primary care doctors manage many acute and chronic conditions, many of us will need [specialized care](#) at some point in our lives. Whether you need to see a dermatologist or your child needs an allergist, your primary care doctor can help connect you to the right specialist. They'll coordinate with your specialty doctors to ensure that the right information is shared, nothing is missed and no tests are duplicated.

Navigating the health care system on your own can feel overwhelming sometimes. With a primary care doctor, you don't have to.

5. You'll have a trusted health advocate and advisor

Your primary care doctor is not only a health expert, but your health advocate.

The relationship that develops between a primary care doctor and patient over time can be valuable in many ways. For one, the better your doctor knows you and understands your health history, the better they can care for you and help guide your long term health.

Getting to know your doctor can also help you feel more comfortable sharing personal information and asking questions. When you have a primary care physician, you're not starting from square one every time you see a doctor. Your doctor already knows you and your health history, so you won't have to explain the same things over and over at every appointment.