



“How to Find a General Pediatrician”

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Having a new baby can be an overwhelming experience for many parents, especially those who have delivered prematurely. Much of the planning for a newborn has been left undone, but one of the most important tasks and decisions at hand is to find a general pediatrician for your child.

A pediatrician is a medical doctor who has had at least three years of specialized residency training in children's health after four years of medical school.

Although your infant's medical care in the intensive care unit may be performed by a neonatologist (who is a pediatrician with additional years of subspecialty fellowship training in the care of the sick newborn), a general pediatrician may work in conjunction with the neonatologist while the baby is in the NICU and continue your infant's general medical care after discharge from the hospital.

For those of you who have older children and already have a good relationship with a pediatrician, the search process may just entail a short interview with your present pediatrician to see if your doctor is comfortable taking on your new baby as a patient and is aware of any special medical needs or follow-up care for your baby. Your pediatrician may facilitate his or her care of the child by speaking with the neonatologist who is caring for your baby.

Many new parents may take suggestions from family or friends regarding a pediatrician, but an interview in person is strongly recommended since this physician will hopefully develop a long and trusting relationship with you and your family. An interview enables you to ask questions and learn as much as possible about the doctor and to see how comfortable you are with him or her.

Before scheduling an interview with a pediatrician, some important information may be gained over the phone and would help to narrow down your list of prospective candidates:

- Is the physician board certified or board eligible in pediatrics?
- Is the physician on staff at a hospital with a pediatric department?
- Is the pediatrician accepting new patients?
- Does the pediatrician belong to your health insurance plan?

The actual interview may be looked upon not only as a question and answer session, but also as a great time to see what the pediatrician's office and staff are like. Questions you may prepare to ask yourself after the interview are "is the pediatrician's office conveniently located?", "did the office feel safe and clean?", "was I comfortable with the doctor?" and "was the staff friendly and helpful?"

SUGGESTED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The interview should not be limited to these questions alone. You may want to include questions regarding philosophies about any of your specific concerns e.g. breastfeeding, child behavior or discipline.

1. How long have you been in practice?
2. Is this a group practice? If so, how many doctors are in your group?
3. Do you or any of your associates have sub-specialties?
4. Who covers for you when you are on vacation or unavailable?
5. Do you have nurse practitioners? If so, what is their role?
6. Are there separate waiting areas for well baby visits and sick children?
7. What are your office hours? Are any evening or weekend hours available?
8. How far in advance must I make routine appointments?
9. How can I reach you in an emergency and after hours?
10. How does your office handle phone inquiries for advice?
11. Are you comfortable with the special needs of my child? Would you be able to coordinate any follow-up care by specialists?
12. Will you be able to visit my child in the NICU before discharge?

Evaluate the answers to these questions and weigh them in view of your own expectations and the needs of your child. Your final decision may be based on your gut instinct. It is important that you feel confident in the doctor's ability and comfortable with his or her personality. Choosing a pediatrician is the initial step in developing a long term relationship with someone who shares your common goal - the health and happiness of your child.

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