

KNOW YOUR BENEFITS



Primary Care Facts and Myths



Primary care is the starting point for most of your health care needs. Between annual checkups, preventive screenings and treatments for long-term conditions, a primary care provider (PCP) helps you stay on track. PCPs can also identify issues early, when they are easier and less costly to treat, and connect you to specialists when needed.

Your PCP is more than just the person you see when you're not feeling well. They're a partner in your overall health, offering nutrition, exercise, stress management and even mental health guidance.

Building an ongoing relationship with a PCP means having someone who understands your history, keeps track of your progress and works with you to stay healthier over time.

Types of PCPs

Employers may offer health plans that cover a variety of providers who can serve as your PCP. Knowing the differences can help you choose the right fit for you or your family. Here's a breakdown of these providers:

- **Family medicine physicians**—These providers care for patients of all ages, from children to seniors, and often serve entire families.
- **Internal medicine physicians**—Focused on adult care, these professionals emphasize prevention, diagnosis and management of chronic conditions.
- **Pediatricians**—Specialists in children's health, these providers deliver comprehensive care from infancy through adolescence.
- **Obstetricians and gynecologists (OB/GYNs)**—For women who prefer to center their care on reproductive health, OB/GYNs can also act as PCPs.
- **Nurse practitioners (NPs) and physician assistants (PAs)**—Both of these professionals are trained to diagnose medical issues, treat such conditions, prescribe related medications and provide preventive services. NPs and PAs generally deliver care under the direction of licensed physicians.

5 Facts About Having a PCP Relationship

PCPs do more than handle routine visits. Research shows that having a consistent PCP leads to better outcomes and a smoother health care experience. Consider these five facts:

1. **Continuity of care improves outcomes.** A PCP learns your medical history, lifestyle and preferences over time, which allows for more personalized recommendations.
2. **Regular visits support early detection.** Regular visits make it easier to spot small changes in your health before they become major concerns.
3. **Care is better coordinated with a PCP.** A PCP serves as the central point of contact, ensuring that treatments from specialists work together effectively.
4. **Familiar providers foster open communication.** Familiarity builds trust, making it easier to talk about sensitive health issues.

5. **PCPs can provide initial mental health support.** In addition to physical care, many PCPs screen for conditions such as anxiety or depression and offer initial guidance or treatment. They may refer patients to specialized providers for more complex needs, such as ongoing therapy or psychiatric medication management.

5 Common Myths About Primary Care

1. **Myth 1: You only need a PCP when you're not feeling well.**

Reality: Primary care is not just for illnesses; it's also about prevention. Annual checkups and screenings can catch problems early, and your PCP can help you make smart choices for your overall wellness.

2. **Myth 2: Any doctor can serve as a PCP.**

Reality: Specialists such as dermatologists or cardiologists are not PCPs. A PCP offers general, ongoing care and coordinates treatment across specialties.

3. **Myth 3: All PCPs provide the same services.**

Reality: Different types of PCPs, such as family physicians, internists, pediatricians and OB/GYNs, focus on different patient populations and areas of care. Choosing the right provider depends on your age, health needs and personal preferences.

4. **Myth 4: Primary care is only for basic issues.**

Reality: PCPs manage complex conditions, including diabetes, asthma and high blood pressure. They provide ongoing treatment plans and adjust care as your needs evolve.

5. **Myth 5: Seeing a PCP is inconvenient and time-consuming.**

Reality: Many primary care offices offer extended hours, same-day appointments and virtual visits. With these options, getting care can be easier than people expect. Even seeing your PCP for an annual physical can help identify potential health issues.

Conclusion

Primary care is the foundation of your health journey. By building a relationship with a trusted provider, you gain access to preventive care, chronic condition management and coordinated treatment across the health care system. PCPs do more than respond when you're feeling unwell; they work with you to maintain long-term wellness, address physical and mental health needs, and reduce overall health care costs.

Understanding the facts and dispelling common myths can help you utilize this benefit to its fullest potential. Taking advantage of primary care is one of the simplest and most effective ways to maintain good health.

Consult with your employer to learn more about the primary care options available through your health plan and how to choose a provider that best suits your needs.