

Finding the right OB-GYN

April 21 2023



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An obstetrician-gynecologist, or OB-GYN, accompanies patients through some of the most significant events of their lives.

Family planning, pregnancy and the births of children. Changes that come with aging and menopause. In some cases, life-threatening

diseases. Because [women](#) and their OB-GYNs share so much, their comfort with their doctor is imperative, said Dr. Laura Hunter, an OB-GYN at Penn State Health Obstetrics and Gynecology and Penn State Health Lancaster Medical Center.

That adds an extra layer to your search for the right doctor. Offices must be accessible, insurance must be compatible and personalities need to mesh.

"You have to feel comfortable sharing intimate details of your life with this person," Hunter said. "If you don't, you should find a different doctor."

Below are a few questions and answers you can consider when picking the right OB-GYN for you.

What does an OB-GYN Do?

An OB-GYN provides both obstetric and gynecological care for patients. That includes diagnosing and treating disorders of the reproductive system, addressing women's health issues, delivering babies and caring for patients during and following pregnancy.

A [physician](#) can be either an obstetrician or a gynecologist, meaning they specialize in only one area of a woman's care. Many doctors, however, elect to pursue both specialties.

OB-GYNs may be employed by a health care system or a private practice and typically work in facilities such as a hospital, medical office, women's health clinic or birthing center.

Choosing an OB-GYN assures uninterrupted care from your physician, which can result in trust built over time.

What are some practical considerations when looking for an OB-GYN?

While finding an OB-GYN you trust and are comfortable with is important, don't forget about the following:

- Look for someone in your provider network to increase the chances your insurance will cover their services. Your insurance company's website should include a list of in-network providers.
- Pick an OB-GYN's office that's close to your home or office. And make sure the OB-GYN has practice privileges at the hospital you plan to use.
- Once you've identified several candidates, look for their online biographies to learn more about their education, training, experience and areas of expertise. You can verify that a physician is board certified using the American Board of Medical Specialties' Certification Matters tool.

"Call the local hospital with an obstetrics unit and ask to talk to a nurse," said Dr. Christina DeAngelis, an OB-GYN at Penn State Health Obstetrics and Gynecology and assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology at Penn State College of Medicine. "If you want an honest recommendation for a good OB-GYN, ask a labor and delivery nurse."

Your primary care physician may be able to recommend an OB-GYN who's a good fit for you, based on your personality.

Is personality really that important?

Beyond practical considerations, Hunter recommends that women follow their instincts when choosing an OB-GYN.

"Women have a sixth sense that comes into play when they meet someone," she said. "There's no magic tool for finding an OB-GYN who's a good fit for you, but you'll know if you feel comfortable or not."

If you don't feel like you'll be able to talk honestly with an OB-GYN, your doctor-patient relationship will suffer and the doctor's ability to help you will be diminished.

"I can't help someone who's finding it painful to have sex if she's not able to talk to me about that," Hunter said.

It's not the role of a doctor to judge a patient, DeAngelis said. A doctor should listen carefully and address your concerns without allowing any personal values or opinions to influence their response.

"Patients need to know they can trust their OB-GYN," DeAngelis said. "We need to be able to address their concerns, regardless of what they are."

How do I get started with an OB-GYN?

While the recommended age for a first Pap test — which screens for [cervical cancer](#) — is 21, Hunter said gynecologic care should begin earlier in the event of very heavy or painful periods or other issues. A young woman who is sexually active or planning to become sexually active also would benefit from seeing an OB-GYN.

"There really is no hard and fast rule of when to begin care," she said. "It depends on the circumstances of each patient."

A woman who is pregnant or plans to become pregnant should establish a relationship with an OB-GYN as soon as possible.

DeAngelis explained that what is included in an annual gynecological exam will vary based on the age of patient. While an exam normally includes an assessment of vital signs, blood pressure screening, weight check, breast exam and a check of the heart and lungs, patients of different ages may also receive advice on contraception, counseling on menopause or hormonal treatment and cancer screenings.

"We consider the needs of every patient and treat each patient accordingly," she said. "It's important to focus on every person as an individual."

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

Citation: Finding the right OB-GYN (2023, April 21) retrieved 7 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-04-ob-gyn.html>

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