

SELECTING YOUR BABY'S DOCTOR

Pediatricians and Family Practice physicians both provide care for infants and children. They provide well baby check-ups, immunizations, as well as care during serious illness. They are available to answer questions about all aspects of infant and childcare from colds and rashes to behavior and development. However, not all doctors are the same. It is important to find a doctor with whom you would feel comfortable discussing any issue concerning your child and your family. Interviewing one or more pediatricians/family practice doctors is the best way to choose who will provide care for your child. To aid you in this process, we have compiled a list of questions that you may find helpful to ask the pediatrician/family practice doctor in order for you to get a better idea of their philosophies and how they practice.

Some questions you may want to ask when you first call the doctor's office, prior to scheduling an appointment for an interview: Questions regarding location of the office, practice set up and insurance will help you decide if you want to set up an interview. These can include...

- Location---- You may want to choose a practice close to home or to work (the ease of travel to the office at any time or in a "non-hospital emergency room" type of "urgent visit")
- What are the office hours?
- Can the baby be examined within the first 3-7 days of birth?
- How many doctors (Nurse Practitioners, Physician Assistants) are involved in the practice (size of the practice)?
- The other persons who may be associated with the pediatrician (back up physician, pediatric nurse practitioner) who may take call. Is it a solo practice?
- What are the doctor's professional credentials?
- Does the doctor have admitting privileges at the hospital where you are going for delivery? If not, who will see your baby in the hospital?
- With what hospital is the doctor affiliated (in case hospitalization is ever necessary)? What are the special practices, if any, of the pediatric unit (i.e., open visiting or rooming-in)?
- What insurance plans are accepted and what are the specific office fees (i.e., office visits, immunization, telephone consultation, emergency visits)? What fee adjustments can be made in relation to family income (sliding scale)?

When you arrive at the office for your interview, look around. Get a feel for the office environment. Is the waiting room clean, bright and playful? Is it clean and safe? Does the staff seem to enjoy working with children? Here are some suggestions on other questions you may want to ask. Don't expect to have time to ask them all during one conversation. Ask the ones that are important to you and any other questions of your own. It is important to find a doctor with whom you can easily communicate, who shows you respect, and whose basic philosophy of childbearing and childrearing is compatible with yours.

- How big is the practice? How long does it take to get an appointment?
- How much time is scheduled for each appointment? (A good answer is 15-20 minutes or more for well baby visits)
- Can you call or e-mail with questions that wouldn't require an office visit? Is there a charge for this? Is there a specific "telephone phone-in" hour/time set aside daily/weekly for non-urgent questions/concerns?
- What is the policy for calls after hours?
- Who is responsible for covering emergency calls including those on nights and weekends?
- Does the doctor make house calls? If so, in what instances?

- What is the schedule of office visits for normal health maintenance of newborns (“well baby visits”)?
- Is there a separate waiting room for well baby visits and sick babies? Are there separate office hours?
- What are the doctor’s views on infant feeding?
- What percentage of babies in their practice are breastfed? What percentage use supplements? What percentage of babies are solely breastfed without supplements at 6 months of age?
- How does the doctor support breastfeeding efforts and difficulties?
- What is the doctor’s policy regarding breastfeeding and newborn jaundice? At what point would the doctor recommend hospitalization?
- When and how does the doctor recommend weaning?
- What will the doctor do (support services) to help you get off to a good start in the first days/weeks after birth?
- What are the doctor’s views about working and parenting?
- How well does the doctor know the infant and toddler programs in the community?
- What are the doctor’s views about immunization?
- What are the doctor’s responses to your questions (open, guarded, defensive)? If the pediatrician/family practice doctor invites you into the office, take the opportunity and observe doctor-child interaction. Did you feel comfortable talking with the pediatrician/family practice doctor?

Since these are suggested *guidelines*, you may have some other criteria upon which you are making your decision. Review your feelings to the information you receive. Your selection will be based on favorable responses to those criteria in which you feel are most important. Remember, in the end, the parents and child are the client.