How to Choose a Specialist
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Initial steps:
- Always ask your primary care physician for a recommendation. This is usually the best source as your doctor would have experience working with the specialist.
- If your primary care physician does not know of a specialist, another option is to contact the best hospital in your area and find out who is on their staff.
- Another resource for finding a specialist in your geographic location is this website: http://health.usnews.com/top-doctors. On this website, you can enter a specialty and your zip code. These “top doctors” have been nominated by peers and have gone through a review process. However, the listing is limited to certain geographic areas.
- Physicians should be BOARD CERTIFIED in their specialty.
- Most specialists have a subspecialty or interest. For example, a gastroenterologist might have a particular expertise in inflammatory bowel disease. So, if possible, try to find a specialist with expertise or interest in your specific condition. Review their profiles.

Before you see the specialist:
- Check with your insurance company to see if your visits with the specialist are covered under your plan.
- If being treated at a specific hospital is important to you; check to see if that the specialist has privileges there.
- If you or a family member has a language issue; be certain to check the languages spoken by the physician.
- Have copies of your medical records – it is particularly helpful if you can get these records to the specialist BEFORE your appointment so that they can review them prior to your visit.
- Have a list of your CURRENT medications, including vitamins and supplements.

Questions to ask the specialist:
- How many patients with my specific condition have you treated?
- What is the specialist’s success rate in treating patients with my condition?
- How many days per week does the physician see patients? (some physicians may spend more time in research positions, so you’ll want to know how much experience they have treating patients).
- How often will I need to see you for appointments?
- Will you be managing my care, or will my primary care physician take over once you have been consulted?
- What should you expect on initial and subsequent visits?
- Who takes care of patients after hours and when the physician is gone?
- How do I reach you if there is an emergency?
- What symptoms should be reported to you immediately?
- What are my treatment options?
- What are the side effects of the treatment?
- Will any tests need to be performed, and what will they tell us?
- How long after treatment before I begin to see any improvement in my condition?
- Are there lifestyle changes that I can make that would help my condition?

Although your choice of specialists may be limited due to your personal health insurance plan, it’s still important that you feel comfortable with the physician, including their bedside manner. After you see a specialist, make sure that your primary care physician gets a report from the specialist.