

GOOD KIDS BAD HABITS

The RealAge® Guide to Raising Healthy Children

How to Select the Right Health-Care Provider for Your Child

First off, you need to decide what kind of practitioner will suit your family best. The three most common providers of children's medical care are:

- Pediatricians—physicians who specialize in the care of kids from birth through young adulthood
- Family physicians/practitioners—doctors who provide health care for all members of the family
- Pediatric nurse practitioners—RNs with advanced training who provide some primary care for kids and can do many basic tasks performed by physicians as well

Once you've decided what type appeals to you the most, ask around for some recommendations, narrow your list, call their offices, and ask a few questions:

- What are your office hours? *(Are they convenient for your schedule?)*
- How many doctors are in the practice? *(More may be better; you'll have backups in case your doctor is unavailable.)*
- Which hospital are you affiliated with? *(How does it compare with others in your area? Is it convenient?)*
- What types of insurance plans do you participate in? *(It's best to double-check!)*

Finally, meet the candidates who seem to fit you best face-to-face. Many parents do this even before their first baby is born. If you already have kids, bring them along; their reaction is important, too. Consider the following during your meeting:

- Does the doctor make you and your children feel comfortable?
- Does the doctor talk directly to the kids?
- Does the doctor explain things well? In language children can understand?
- Does the doctor listen to questions and concerns, or seem rushed for time?
- Do you share similar philosophies on child-rearing issues (such as breastfeeding, circumcision, sleep training, diet, exercise)?