

PRIMARY CARE PROVIDER (PCP) VS SPECIALIST



Who Should I See First — and Why It Matters

WHAT IS A PRIMARY CARE PROVIDER (PCP)?

A Primary Care Provider (PCP) is your **main doctor or nurse**.



Your PCP:

- ✓ Knows your health history
- ✓ Treats common illnesses
- ✓ Helps manage long-term conditions (like diabetes or asthma)
- ✓ Orders lab tests and screenings
- ✓ Refers you to specialists if needed

Think of your PCP as your health home.

WHAT IS A SPECIALIST?

A specialist is a doctor who focuses on **one part of the body or one type of condition**.



Examples of specialists:

- Heart doctor (Cardiologist)
- Diabetes doctor (Endocrinologist)
- Lung doctor (Pulmonologist)
- Bone or joint doctor (Orthopedist)

Specialists are important — but they are not always the first step.

WHO SHOULD I SEE FIRST?

Most of the time, you should see your PCP first.

Your PCP can:

- Treat many problems without a specialist
- Decide if you really need specialty care
- Help you avoid unnecessary tests

Seeing a specialist first is usually needed only when:

- Your PCP sends you
- You have a serious or complex condition
- Your insurance requires a referral

WHY SEEING YOUR PCP FIRST CAN SAVE YOU MONEY



Seeing your PCP:

- ✓ Usually costs less
- ✓ May have a low or no copay
- ✓ Can prevent emergency room visits



Seeing a specialist:

- ✓ Often costs more
- ✓ May require referrals
- ✓ Can lead to more tests and bills

Starting with your PCP helps control healthcare costs.

WHAT CAN HAPPEN IF YOU SKIP YOUR PCP



- ✗ Higher medical bills
- ✗ Delays in care
- ✗ Missed diagnoses
- ✗ Insurance may not cover visits

Your PCP helps guide your care the right way.

HOW TO USE THE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM WISELY



- ✓ Know who your PCP is
- ✓ Call your PCP when you feel sick
- ✓ Ask if you need a referral
- ✓ Go to a specialist only when recommended

HOW A HEALTH NAVIGATOR CAN HELP

A Health Navigator can:



Help you find a PCP



Explain when to see a specialist



Help schedule appointments



Explain insurance rules

Knowing who to see first helps protect your health **and** your money.

This flyer is for education and supports health literacy and access to appropriate care.