

Understanding Difference Between Primary and Specialty Providers



What is a Primary Care Provider?

A Primary Care Provider (PCP) is whomever you see for basic health care, including physicals and immunizations. Your PCP may be a doctor (MD or DO) or advanced practice provider, like a nurse practitioner (NP) or physician's assistant (PA). You may also know them as a family practice doctor, pediatrician, or internist.

What is a Specialist?

A specialist is a doctor or advanced practice provider who focuses on a specific area of medicine and treats certain health conditions.

An **Endocrinologist** is a specialty provider who is trained in the diagnosis and treatment of diabetes. Regular follow-up with an Endocrinologist is important to staying healthy.

You may also see other specialty providers if you have other health conditions or health problems. Below is a list of different kinds of specialists:

- Cardiologist (heart)
- Nephrologist (kidney)
- Neurologist (brain)
- Optometrist or Ophthalmologist (eye)
- Orthopedist (bone)
- Psychologist or Psychiatrist (mental health)
- Pulmonologist (lung)

How can I see a Specialist?

- Some insurance companies require a referral to see a specialist. You can get the referral from your Endocrinologist or PCP.
- **IMPORTANT**— If your insurance plan requires a referral to see a specialist, and you do not get one, the insurance company may not to pay for the visit. You would then have to pay the bill on your own. If you are unsure if you need a referral, call your insurance company and ask.