

# How Do You Find the Right Parkinson's Doctor?

The best doctor for you has the right credentials, and a personality, practice and treatment approach that match your wants and needs.

But how do you find that doctor? Consider these tips:



## Look for the right credentials

If possible, get care with a fellowship-trained movement disorder specialist. This is a neurologist who has completed one to two years of training focused on caring for people with Parkinson's disease (PD) and other movement disorders. (A general neurologist treats PD as well as many other brain conditions and may not have the same experience with Parkinson's as a movement disorder specialist.) Movement disorder specialists have more familiarity with diagnosis, treatment options and the latest research. It's never too early or late to see a movement disorder specialist. You can find one online ([mds.movementdisorders.org/directory](https://mds.movementdisorders.org/directory)) or ask others with PD, your primary care physician or general neurologist for a recommendation.

## Make a list of care goals

Knowing what you want to achieve with your doctor may help you home in on the best clinician and/or center to meet your needs. Are you looking for someone to provide ongoing care? Do you have a specific aim, such as getting a second opinion on diagnosis, hearing a fresh perspective on changing symptoms or having a conversation about deep brain stimulation (DBS)? Asking other people in your PD community about their experiences can lend insights on how a doctor interacts, communicates and approaches treatment. Online professional profiles detailing doctors' education, research and interests also may help. (A doctor who leads research on Parkinson's mood symptoms, for example, may be particularly helpful for depression.)





## Decide what traits you want in a clinical care partner

Your doctor is your teammate in Parkinson's — someone to walk with you and your loved ones through life and disease. What qualities do you hope for in this partner? Most people say they want someone who listens, hears their needs, and works with them to manage symptoms. Some value optimism and humor or simply kindness and compassion. If research is a priority, you may want a doctor who runs clinical trials. If complementary therapies are important, you might want someone who is open to incorporating (or learning) about these types of treatments.

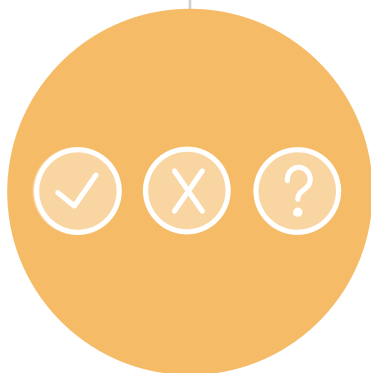
Sometimes, a doctor looks great on paper or works well for someone else but isn't a good match for you. Like dating, you may have to meet a few different people to find the best fit.

## Find a general neurologist, if necessary

If there isn't a movement disorder specialist near you or symptoms make it tough to visit, see a general neurologist for regular visits and any urgent needs. This also is important for people who travel far from home to have DBS surgery.

It's worth seeing a movement disorder specialist once or twice a year, if possible. If you have more than one "Parkinson's doctor," make sure you and your doctors know who is responsible for prescribing and adjusting medications, programming DBS, or ordering and monitoring other treatments, such as physical therapy. To avoid confusion, it's often best to have one doctor make changes and the others make recommendations. At each visit, get a summary of what was done and ask your doctor to communicate with other care team members.





## Know your options

Movement disorder specialists practice in a wide range of settings. Some care for patients at academic medical centers affiliated with medical schools, which means they lead research and teach medical students and doctors in training. This can mean longer visits that include trainees, but patients often describe these appointments as feeling more thorough. Others work in office practices, alone or with other neurologists or other types of doctors. Some people find this more efficient as visits may move more quickly. Private practice doctors may not be as likely to lead research (although some do) but they still can connect you to ongoing trials. Insurance also may be a consideration; not every doctor takes Medicare, for example. Confirm ahead of time with the doctor's office and your insurer whether your visit is covered.

Just as settings vary, so does level of experience. Some patients prefer newly trained doctors, feeling as though they are likely to be up on the latest in medicine, research and technology. (It also may be faster or easier to get an appointment as they build their practice.) Other patients prefer a doctor with decades of practice under their belt.

Managing Parkinson's is a partnership and it's important to find the right doctor(s) for you. You might not get it right on the first try or you may decide, after many years with one doctor, that you need a change. Be clear about what you want and need from your care and from your partner in care.

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