



Questions to Ask a Pediatrician

Things you want to know before you entrust your family's health to a new doctor

By Dionna Ford

If you are pregnant and looking for a pediatrician or family doctor, or you are moving and losing your old physician, it's helpful to interview several candidates before deciding whom to entrust with your family's health concerns. As a natural-minded parent, you might only rarely visit a doctor. But it's nice to know that when you do need to make an appointment, you won't get hassled for your family's choices or be confronted with a doctor who is unfamiliar with things like child-led weaning or an intact male.

But what do you ask a potential family doctor? What should you look for in his or her demeanor and office? Below is a long list of questions and other factors you might want to consider. This list is mainly aimed at expectant parents, but many questions also apply to a family moving practices.

The following questions are organized according to Natural Parents Network's list of topics relevant to "natural parenting." For more on natural parenting, visit the Natural Parents Network Resource Pages.

Other Factors of Note

If you have children, consider bringing them along. Notice how the office staff and physician respond to your children. Listen for whether the physician is "accepting" of alternative practices (i.e., delayed vaccinations) or whether he or she actually "welcomes" them.

You want a physician who will support you in your choices, not harass you to do something differently every time you set foot in the office. Before you start interviewing physicians, talk to other natural parents in your area and get recommendations. You can find local parenting groups through the Natural Parents Network, *PATHWAYS* magazine's Pathways Connect Gathering Groups, *Mothering's* "Find Your Tribe," or Attachment Parenting International.

Finally, remember to trust your gut. If something seems off to you in the interview, do not feel obligated to hire the physician. You are in charge of your healthcare—don't be afraid to find someone who will fit your family's needs! 📍



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GENERAL PRACTICE • Many of these questions can be asked over the phone before you even set up an appointment to interview the physician, or the answers can be gleaned from the physician's website.

Are you accepting new patients? **YES / NO**

How long have you been practicing?

Why did you decide to become a pediatrician?

Do you have any areas of specialty?

What journals or other publications do you read regularly?

How many children do you have?

What are your office hours? Do you offer evening or weekend appointments?

Do you offer same-day sick appointments? How far in advance do checkups ("well baby/child visits") need to be scheduled?

What if my baby gets sick when the office is closed? Who covers in an emergency if you aren't on call?

Is this a solo or group practice? If it's solo, who covers when you are gone? If it's a group, how often will we see you, and how often will we see other members?

Do you have separate sick and well waiting rooms? **YES / NO**

How long does a patient typically wait in the waiting room?

How long does a patient typically wait in the exam room?

On average, how long do you spend with each patient?

Do you accept calls for routine and non-emergency questions? **YES / NO**

If I leave a message, how long does it usually take you to return the call?

Do you respond to questions by e-mail? **YES / NO**

What hospitals do you work with?

Do you take my insurance? **YES / NO**

Is there an extra charge for:

1) Advice calls during the day? **YES / NO** 2) Advice calls after hours? **YES / NO**

3) Medication refills? **YES / NO** 4) Filling out forms? **YES / NO**

What other fees will apply?

Which tests are handled in the office, and which are done elsewhere? Where?

What are your policies for insurance claims, lab policies, payments and billing?

What is your schedule for well baby checkups? Are you comfortable with families who do not follow the recommended schedule?

Are you familiar with the signs of sexual and other abuse? **YES / NO**

Have you ever felt one of your pediatric patients was being abused? If so, what did you do? **YES / NO**

PREGNANCY, BIRTH AND PARENTING

- What books do you recommend for new parents, and why?

- What parenting/health books do you disagree with, and why?

- What are your views on homebirth (or other birthing options)?

- Will your initial meeting with my baby be at the hospital (if you are birthing at a hospital) or the first checkup?
How soon does the first meeting need to be scheduled?

- What testing do you provide for newborns who were born at home or in a birth center?

BREASTFEEDING AND BEYOND

- Do you ever take continuing education classes on breastfeeding topics? YES / NO
- What percentage of your patients are breastfed?
- Do you provide formula samples/literature to your expectant mothers? YES / NO
- If a breastfed baby seems to have trouble gaining weight, what would you suggest the mother do?

- What are your views on bottle feeding? Nipple confusion?

- Do you ever recommend putting baby on a feeding schedule? YES / NO
- What care do you recommend for a baby who appears to be jaundiced?

- Under what conditions do you suggest a breastfeeding mother supplement with formula?

- What do you recommend to breastfeeding mothers who are returning to work?

- What is your family's breastfeeding experience?

- When do you recommend a baby start solid foods?
- At what age do you feel a baby should be weaned from the breast? Why?

- Are you supportive of child-led weaning? YES / NO
- Do you have working relationships with any lactation consultants? YES / NO
- What are your views on childhood obesity?

- What are your views on vegan/vegetarian/etc. lifestyles?

SLEEP, NURTURING TOUCH, AND DISCIPLINE

- Are you supportive of families who co-sleep? **YES / NO**

- How old do you think a baby should be when he can “sleep through the night”?

- What is your definition of “sleeping through the night”?

- What would you recommend to a mother who said her baby was waking frequently in the night?

- What are your views on baby wearing? Do you recommend mothers put their babies on the floor for any certain amount of time?

- What are your views on discipline? Corporal punishment?

- How do you recommend parents respond to temper tantrums? Night waking from toddlers? Boundary testing?

- Will you discuss my child’s general growth and issues, like discipline and social development?

HOLISTIC HEALTH PRACTICES

- What are your views on natural/ holistic care for children? (Chiropractic, acupuncture, etc.)

- What is your policy on antibiotics? (Does the doctor try alternatives before prescribing antibiotics?)

- Do you welcome patients who do not vaccinate, or vaccinate on a delayed/alternative schedule? **YES / NO**

- Do you feel there are adverse reactions to vaccines? If so, do you report them to VAERS? **YES / NO**

- What percentage of your patients are circumcised?

- Do you provide parents with information about circumcision (the functions of the foreskin, possible problems associated with circumcision, the AAP’s stance, etc.)? **YES / NO**

- Do you perform circumcisions? Why or why not? **YES / NO**

- Do you feel it is helpful to retract (or “pull back just a little”) a boy’s foreskin for any reason? **YES / NO**

- Have you been educated on the proper care of intact boys? **YES / NO**

- Have you ever recommended circumcision for an intact boy later in life? **YES / NO**

NOTES
