



## HouseWorks Resource Update

# Choosing a Geriatrician

**Although geriatrics is growing as a medical specialty, finding quality geriatric care can still be a challenge.** Choosing the right specialist is never easy and there continues to be a nationwide shortage of geriatricians. For many seniors, however, finding a great geriatrician is well worth the effort.

Geriatricians are physicians who are board-certified in family practice or internal medicine and have completed additional training in geriatrics. These specialists tend to view aging more holistically than other primary-care physicians. According to AARP, geriatricians view old age as an opportunity for growth and fulfillment rather than a time of inevitable decline, disability, and disease. Their approach to treatment reflects this perspective.

Geriatricians take time to examine each patient's special characteristics, values and preferences. They consider a host of factors that impact quality of life including diet, medication management, natural changes in metabolism, depression and loss, and family dynamics. Geriatricians are trained to look at *function* as well as disease. A geriatrician may ask: "Do any of your health conditions keep you from doing what you want to do?", "Who cooks at your house?", or "How many steps are there to your bedroom?" Typically, the geriatrician's office staff

can also help families access care coordination, in-home services, home adaptation resources, and other assistance they may need. Geriatricians understand that paying attention to non-medical needs is crucial to treating illness while promoting wellness.

Most families seek out a geriatrician because they are having difficulty distinguishing normal aging from illness. Consulting with a geriatrician is particularly helpful for seniors with any of the following:

- Chronic or degenerative conditions
- Multiple diagnoses
- Multiple medications
- History of hospitalizations
- History of falling
- Dementia

You can ask for a referral for a geriatrician from your family member's primary care physician. When choosing, remember that "fit" is of paramount importance. You should feel comfortable asking questions and have no hesitation asking the doctor to repeat care instructions or explain test results in terms that make sense to you. The more you know, the more empowered you will feel.

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setting the standard in home care

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### Resources

**American Board of Medical Specialists** [www.abms.org](http://www.abms.org)

*Hosts a searchable database of geriatricians.*

**American Geriatrics Society** [www.americangeriatrics.org](http://www.americangeriatrics.org)

**AGS Foundation for Health in Aging** [www.healthinaging.org](http://www.healthinaging.org)

800-563-4916

**National Institute on Aging** [www.nia.nih.gov](http://www.nia.nih.gov)

800-222-4225