



# 15 Questions to Ask a Pediatrician »

A good pediatrician is an invaluable resource—here's how to find the best fit for your family's needs. **By Bethany Braun-Silva**

As soon-to-be parents can imagine, and current parents know, having a trusted pediatrician is monumentally important. When you're expecting, the checklists of tasks to be completed before baby comes home are already substantial, but nevertheless, it's important to take the time to vet different pediatricians in order to find the right doctor for your family, location, and needs. And, since your baby will need to be seen by a doctor within the first week of birth, it's important to find the right fit before baby arrives so you're comfortable and confident at appointments.

If you're past that stage, there are many reasons why you might be considering switching pediatricians, from the practical concerns such as office hours or location to worries about fit and approach.

So whether you're expecting your first child or looking to switch pediatricians for your kids, we've come up with a list of 15 questions to guide you on your journey to finding the right doctor.

## 1. Is the practice in a convenient location?

It's one thing to strap your week-old baby in a carrier and hop on the subway for a few stops, but it's quite another to lug a stroller up and down those subway stairs or call a car service to get you to the opposite end of town. A convenient location might not be the

most important requirement, but it sure does help should your child need an urgent sick visit or if you will be traveling solo or with more than one kid.

## 2. Is the pediatrician board-certified?

If the doctor is certified by the American Board of Pediatrics, that means she has passed a specialized exam in pediatrics. Additionally, if the doctor is a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics the letters "FAAP" will appear after her name. This means they've met established standards for providing child health care.

## 3. What's his child-care ideology?

What are his thoughts on breast-feeding? Co-sleeping? Circumcision? These are all important things your pediatrician can help you with. You might also want to find out his philosophies on sleep training, potty training, and discipline. If your thoughts don't align, this can make for some challenging visits.

## 4. How long does a typical check-up last?

This is something you can get an idea of during a prenatal visit with a pediatrician, should you choose to have one. Does the doctor

take her time? Does she give you an opportunity to ask *all* of your questions? It is best that you don't feel rushed during appointments. New parents are especially exhausted and overwhelmed and it's important they feel at ease at the pediatrician's office.

## 5. Is it a group or solo practice?

If it's a solo practice you will be seeing the same pediatrician each time you visit, although you should ask who covers for him while he's away. If it's a group practice you might be scheduled with different pediatricians or nurse practitioners each time you are there. Consider what's important to you: seeing the same pediatrician every time, or the accessibility that can come from multiple doctors on staff.

## 6. Does the pediatrician have a subspecialty?

Certain pediatricians have subspecialties, such as advanced training in allergies, behavioral issues, endocrinology, or psychiatry. This might be something to consider if there are pre-existing conditions that run in your family.

## 7. What is the doctor's stance on vaccinations?

While the topic of vaccinations can be a bit touchy, you'll want to get clear before you commit on what the doctor's opinion is regarding the timing of vaccinations. Some practices offer a gradual vaccination schedule, if that's something you might be interested in, while others will only stick to the standard schedule.

## 8. Can you get a same-day sick visit?

I can't tell you how many times I've called my son's pediatrician needing an appointment for that same day. I have never been denied, and it has been a source of great relief for me and my family. Not all doctors offer this service, so if urgency is important to you, make sure this is an option.

## 9. Does the office offer evening or weekend hours?

If you're a working parent, it will be difficult to get your child to well visits, never mind sick ones, during regular working hours. Extended and weekend hours can be a lifesaver for some parents.

## 10. What's the wait time?

You'll probably experience some wait time in any doctor's office, but if the office is consistently behind schedule that can be a real issue. Waiting rooms are notoriously germey and full of not-so-happy-kids. Visit prospective offices and check out the wait time for yourself, or ask a parent who's there. There's nothing worse than a room full of crying kids waiting to get shots.

## 11. How does the office look?

Is the place clean? Are there toys and books for your child to play with? Because you might spend at least a few minutes waiting to be seen, it's best to have an office that is appealing to kids. Some offices even provide patients with separate waiting rooms for sick and well kids—something to consider.

## 12. Can you call with questions?

Is there a number to call if you have a simple question regarding your child's health? Sometimes issues are small enough they don't warrant a trip to the office. You want to make sure your office has a number you can call that will connect you to a doctor, nurse, or nurse practitioner on staff. This is also an important after-hours feature as well.

## 13. What is the practice's emergency protocol and hospital affiliation?

If your child has a serious accident or allergic reaction, you will need to know your pediatrician's protocol for handling these emergencies. Does she make house calls? Will he visit children if they end up in the ER?

If the practice has a hospital affiliation, find out about its reputation and if it's close to where you live. Ask how the hospital works in conjunction with the pediatrician's office and if it allows parents to stay in the room overnight with admitted children. Hopefully this will be something you never have to experience, but it's good information to have nonetheless.

## 14. Does the practice accept your insurance?

Find out what plans the office accepts and whether your plan is one of them. Also, it's a good idea to have some knowledge of all the plans they accept in case your insurance changes. If the practice does not accept your insurance, find out if it offers payment plans or a sliding scale for certain services.

## 15. What is your gut feeling?

This is a question for yourself, not the pediatrician, but an important one nonetheless. This doctor will be a very important part of your child's life for years to come. Ultimately you want to find someone who you trust and feel comfortable with. After all, he will be a key player in your child's health and development.