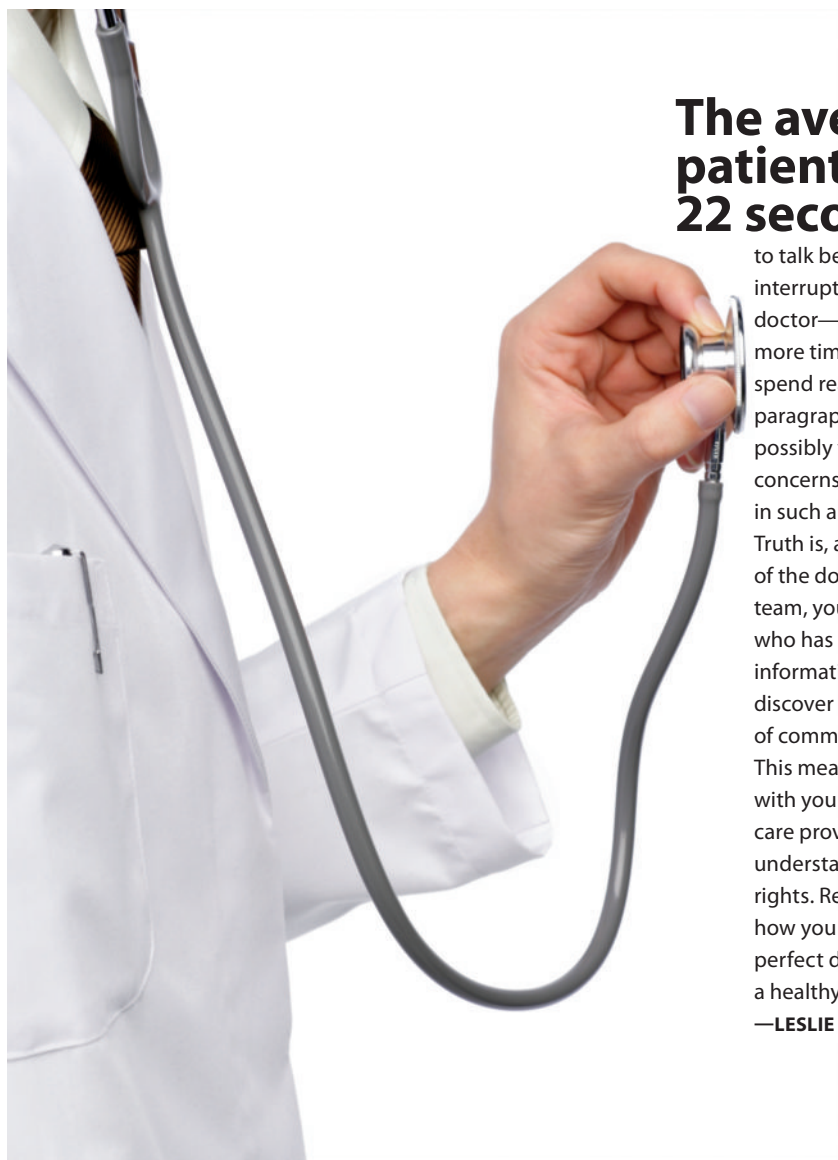


HealthGUIDE

➔ to your next doctor visit



The average patient has 22 seconds

to talk before being interrupted by her doctor—just slightly more time than you'll spend reading this paragraph! Who could possibly voice all of her concerns and questions in such a short span? Truth is, as one-half of the doctor-patient team, you're the one who has to decipher information and discover new ways of communicating. This means working with your health-care provider and understanding your rights. Read on to learn how you can find the perfect doc and forge a healthy relationship.

—LESLIE GOLDMAN

Medical mistakes you must know about

Hospitals and doctors' offices aren't always as healthy as you think. Visit Health.com/medicalmistakes to read the first two parts of our Special Report: Preventing Medical Mistakes—"Read This Before You Go to the Hospital" and "Danger at Your Doctor's Office." And find out what might be lurking over the counter at your local pharmacy in the final installment of this groundbreaking series in our November issue.

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Finding Dr. Right

Move over Marcus Welby, MD (he won our **Health.com** poll of fave docs)—this is what today's Dr. McDreamy looks like.

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Are you a chicken or a fox? Find out how to make your personality work for you.

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Expert advice on when and how to get one. Plus, tips on how to fire your doctor.

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And answers to your other questions about modern-day medical trends.

Finding Dr. Right

There's more to a doctor than a stethoscope and chilly hands. Find out what makes or breaks an effective physician—from head to toe—so you can find your own Dr. McDreamy.

HAIR COLOR

Could this really matter? Sounds silly, but in a 2008 Clairol survey, 77 percent of respondents said a doctor with **brunette hair** seemed the most trustworthy.

LISTENING SKILLS

Dealing with a Chatty Cathy? In a study in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*, researchers found that when a doctor began **talking** about her own weight or recent vacation, he or she rarely returned to the original discussion (a patient's blood pressure, for instance) or listened very well.

TECH SAVVY

Is your physician aware of the most current **record-keeping technology**? Twenty-first-century docs use computers to document their notes and share findings—called “Electronic Health Records”—with other providers in your network.

GIRL POWER

Got a female doc? XX MDs are just as good as XY ones, but a **woman doctor** may have inside knowledge about birth control, pregnancy, and menopause that could directly benefit you, according to a Gallup Organization survey.

LOOKS HEALTHY

Is your doc overweight? A **physician's physique** doesn't correlate with skill or efficacy, says Robert M. Centor, MD, a professor at the University of Alabama Department of Medicine. But if a superficial trait like weight will keep you from trusting her, find a doctor you can relate to.

CREDENTIALS

Is your doc **board-certified** in her specialty (check with the American Board of Medical Specialties, www.abms.org)? Be sure she is. Also, find out if she has hospital privileges, which means she's passed a rigorous credentialing process as well as exams.

EMPATHY

Is she compassionate? Robert Klitzman, MD, associate professor of clinical psychiatry at Columbia University Medical Center, found that **empathy** is crucial, even for docs: “Except for very technical surgery, they tended to opt for a doctor with more empathy.” You're more likely to open up and trust an empathetic doc, which means you'll convey more medical information.

GOOD MANNERS

Does your doc shake your hand? Most patients like to be greeted with a **handshake** and by a doctor who introduces herself using both her first and last names.



Health.com

What you want in a doc:
Someone who ...

1. listens to me.
2. is up on latest medical research.
3. comes highly recommended.

How's your relationship
with your doctor?

44%

I have to be my own advocate.

36%

We're a great team.

20%

What relationship?

Source: **Health.com** poll

SMART DRESSER

Would you rather spill your health secrets to a doc in scrubs or one wearing a white coat? Surprisingly, the answer is neither. A study from the *British Medical Journal* found that most patients prefer a physician who looks professional in **semiformal street clothes**—not too dressy or too trendy.

What kind of patient are you?

No one wants a doctor who's a quack ... but what about a patient who's a chicken?

Could matching your personality to an animal's help you get along with your doctor? Taylor Grant, author of *Health Matters: 8 Steps That Can Save Your Life—and Your Family's Health*, thinks so. She's identified four common "animals," or health personalities. If you're a Bulldog you may bowl over a mild-mannered doc, she says. If you're an Ostrich, you need a doc who sends reminder letters. Of course, some women are timid Ostriches when it comes to their own health but are proactive Bulldogs when it comes to their kids' well-being. In any case, while a tiger typically can't change its stripes, you do have the power to recognize your strengths and weaknesses to better navigate the world of health care.



>>> Chicken Little

Personality traits: Anxious, easily overwhelmed, hypochondriacal

You do this: When the story broke about tuberculosis on an airplane, you freaked out and bombarded your doctor with questions. Illnesses like bird flu are forever on your radar, whereas you sometimes ignore more mundane (yet more real) risks. The Internet is a dangerous place for you, because it fuels your sky-is-falling fears.

What will help you: Find a doctor who understands how you think and can calm you without being dismissive; ask her for concrete statistics about the odds of getting certain rare diseases. Limit your time searching for random medical info. And focus on a plan you can make with your doctor to combat illnesses that may actually run in your family: If there's a history of breast cancer, for instance, map out a screening strategy.

>>> Ostrich

Personality traits: Laid-back, think "no news is good news," big on avoidance



You do this: You'd rather bury your head in the sand than survey the health-care desert. You are more likely to self-treat and will avoid seeking help or treatment until something is broken or bleeding. Many men fall into this category.

What will help you: ID a health buddy—a sister, spouse, or friend—with whom you can check off health-related musts, like going for yearly mammograms or physicals. Having someone check in on you (and you, them) can encourage you to become more proactive.



>>> Fox

Personality traits: Well-informed, health-savvy, big-picture mentality

You do this: You explain your symptoms clearly and are assertive but still value the doctor's opinion. You follow health news but don't panic over every new germ. Actually, a Fox is pretty much an ideal patient.

What will help you: Keep up the great work, and don't let a health challenge derail you. It's pretty easy to be a Fox when you're well, but you may turn into an Ostrich when something serious looms.

>>> Bulldog

Personality traits: Proactive, opinionated, assertive



You do this: On more than one occasion, you've charged into the doctor's office armed with pages torn from medical journals and the names of drugs scribbled down from commercials. You have your diagnosis and treatment plan ready before the doctor has put on her stethoscope.

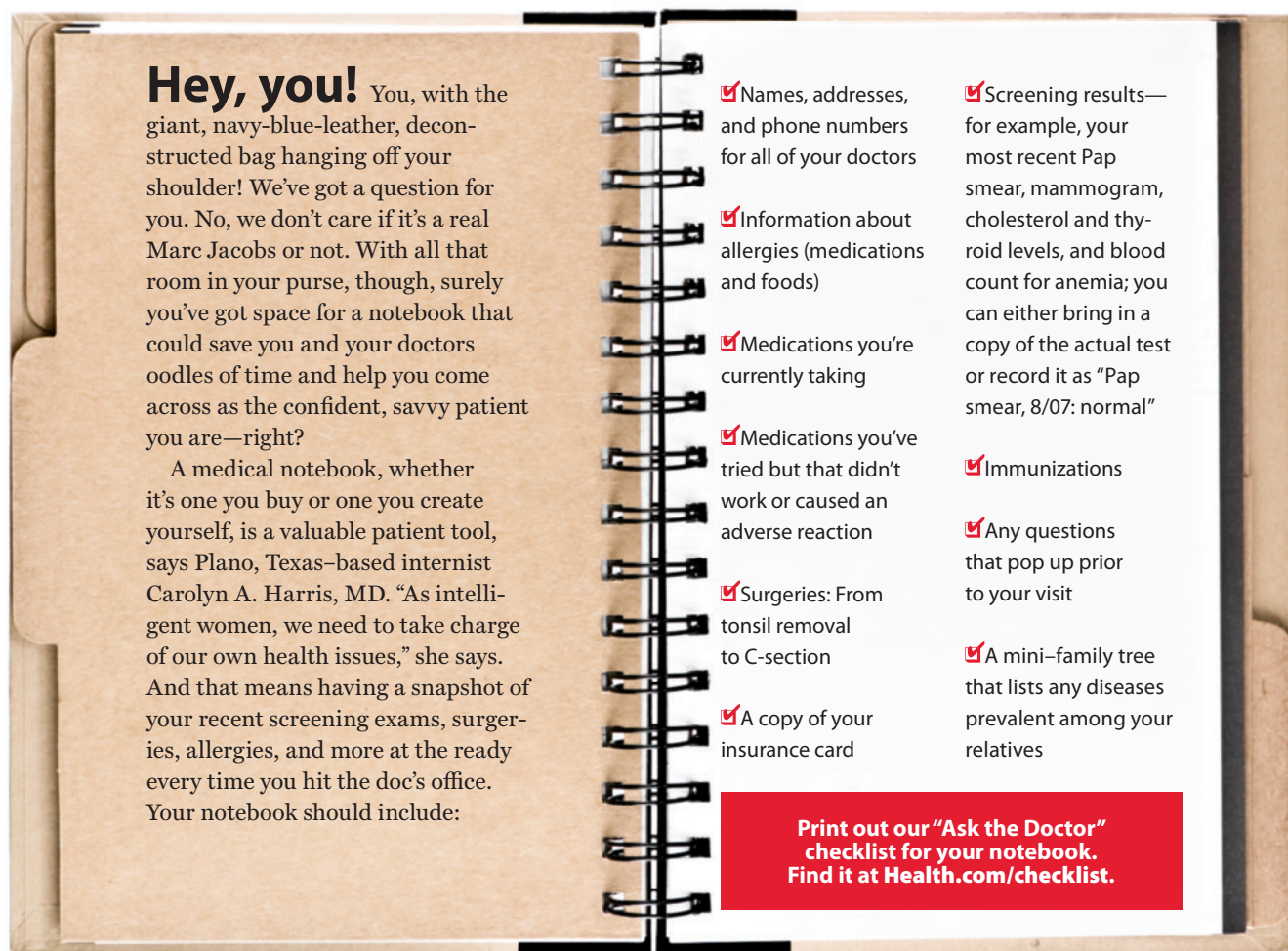
What will help you: Think of yourself as the expert on your health and your doc as the expert in medicine. Physicians have been trained to diagnose—you haven't. And be careful: Bulldogs can intimidate doctors, sending them off-track. ●

The upside of being a Bulldog

● **Sometimes the patient does know best.** When Margaret Mendenhall of Edwardsburg, Michigan, got the results from a physical, she knew something was wrong. "My doctor said my triglyceride count was 1,800 and I should stop eating so many sweets," she says. But Mendenhall didn't have a sweet tooth. "I asked if it could be something else. He said, 'No.'" Mendenhall wasn't convinced: Her son researched high triglycerides, and a friend checked her blood sugar, which was 365 (normal is 140 mg/dL). Eventually, her doctor diagnosed her with diabetes. "I often wonder what would have happened to me if I hadn't taken matters into my own hands," she says. Mendenhall now controls her diabetes with diet and exercise.

➔ The prepared patient

Here's how to be your own best advocate. It starts with a notebook.



Hey, you! You, with the giant, navy-blue-leather, deconstructed bag hanging off your shoulder! We've got a question for you. No, we don't care if it's a real Marc Jacobs or not. With all that room in your purse, though, surely you've got space for a notebook that could save you and your doctors oodles of time and help you come across as the confident, savvy patient you are—right?

A medical notebook, whether it's one you buy or one you create yourself, is a valuable patient tool, says Plano, Texas-based internist Carolyn A. Harris, MD. "As intelligent women, we need to take charge of our own health issues," she says. And that means having a snapshot of your recent screening exams, surgeries, allergies, and more at the ready every time you hit the doc's office. Your notebook should include:

- ✓ Names, addresses, and phone numbers for all of your doctors
- ✓ Information about allergies (medications and foods)
- ✓ Medications you're currently taking
- ✓ Medications you've tried but that didn't work or caused an adverse reaction
- ✓ Surgeries: From tonsil removal to C-section
- ✓ A copy of your insurance card
- ✓ Screening results—for example, your most recent Pap smear, mammogram, cholesterol and thyroid levels, and blood count for anemia; you can either bring in a copy of the actual test or record it as "Pap smear, 8/07: normal"
- ✓ Immunizations
- ✓ Any questions that pop up prior to your visit
- ✓ A mini-family tree that lists any diseases prevalent among your relatives

Print out our "Ask the Doctor" checklist for your notebook. Find it at Health.com/checklist.



Four ways to remember what the doc just told you

Studies show that patients retain only 50 percent of information given to them by their health-care providers. Even worse, of the info that is recalled, about half is wrong! Here, easy ways to rev up your recall.

- **Before you visit, write down your questions** in your health notebook, listing the most important ones first to ensure they get asked and answered.
- **Take notes** or ask your doctor if it's OK for you to record the conversation.
- **Bring a friend** or family member; a second pair of ears means twice the chance of remembering vital information.
- **Ask your doctor to draw a picture** if you think it might help you understand a procedure. Or, ask for printed versions of explanatory info.

➔ Do you need a second opinion?

Expert advice on when and how to get one.

Your doctor has suggested an expensive and invasive test. Or, you have to choose among a variety of therapies to treat a serious illness. Should you get a second opinion? The answer is yes, regardless of whether you have serious doubts or are just curious about alternative treatments, says Peter Salgo, MD, host of PBS's *Second Opinion*. Here, he helps break down what you need to know—and do.

HOW TO TELL YOUR DOC

"The whole concept of asking for another opinion makes patients uneasy—not doctors," Salgo says. "Patients don't want to appear as though they're questioning their doctor's judgment. But, the truth is, all of the physicians I know would appreciate another set of eyes reviewing a difficult case. It can be good to get a fresh perspective." And, he adds, if your doctor does get upset or offended by your request, that's a huge red flag. "I would go so far as to recommend that you fire him or her on the spot," Salgo says. (See "When to Fire Your Doc," at right, for other reasons to change physicians.)

WHEN TO START LOOKING

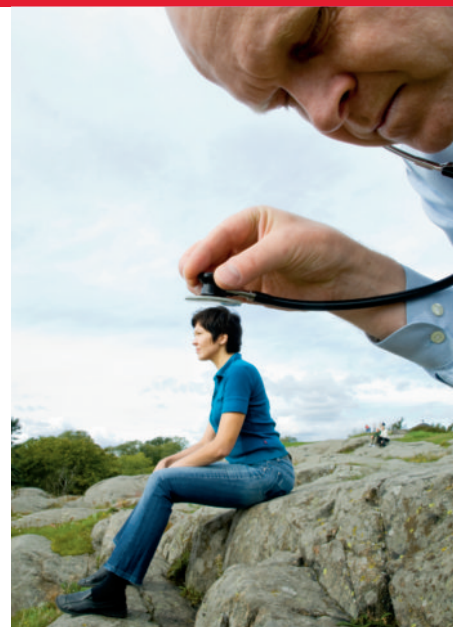
You're entitled to a second opinion regardless of your health issue, but it's particularly important if you have a chronic or potentially life-threatening condition or are considering elective surgery. "Doctors will almost always agree on what the end result should be," Salgo says, "but not always on how to get there. If you have cancer, one doctor could recommend radiation; another might think surgery is the best route. You, the patient, have to make the final decision. Getting various opinions to mix with your own will help shape that decision."

WHERE TO LOOK FOR A SECOND-OPINION DOC

"Ask someone you know and trust for a recommendation," Salgo suggests. If that doesn't turn up any leads, go to a teaching hospital and ask for a list of doctors. Salgo does caution, however, against asking your own doctor for a referral: "He or she isn't going to send you to someone bad, but it's very possible that you will be sent to a like-minded buddy." And this defeats the purpose of getting a second opinion.

WHAT TO DO BEFORE THE APPOINTMENT

Call your insurance provider before scheduling your visit to see if a second opinion will be covered. Most will, but some require you to follow special procedures. Then decide whether to have your records sent over to the new doctor. "Going in blind is a good option if you want start completely fresh with someone," Salgo says. "But if you've had to undergo extensive and/or bothersome tests, you should probably have everything sent over." —ALLISON AVERY



When to fire your doc



Breaking up is hard to do, but that doesn't mean you should stay with a doc you dislike, says Elizabeth Cohen, CNN medical-news correspondent and writer of CNN.com's "Empowered Patient" column. Here, good reasons to call it quits.

- **You're on an assembly line.** If you leave the office feeling that you weren't heard or were misunderstood, get a new doc. However, if you like your doctor but feel she's just too rushed, respect her time constraints and book two back-to-back appointments or ask for the last appointment of the day.
- **Your doc isn't up to date.** If your doc recoils when you walk in with research you've done on the Internet or makes you feel like a cyberchondriac, find someone more accepting. The best docs are up on current research and want you to be, too. They also appreciate the value of a second opinion (more on this at left).
- **You simply don't get along.** If you and your doc rub each other the wrong way, make a change. "She may be a fabulous doctor, but not the fabulous doctor for you," Cohen says. On the other hand, if it's a specialist who is übertalented but a pain in the rear, consider sticking it out; expertise may win out over personality.



➔ Should your gynecologist be your main doctor?

And answers to other questions about medical trends in the news.



Can I use my OB-GYN as my primary care doctor?

Younger women in their 20s to mid-30s who are healthy and free from chronic illnesses get the go-ahead to use OB-GYNs as primary care doctors, says Jennifer Earvolino, MD, medical director of Rush University Internists in Chicago. These patients should still get the basics covered—blood pressure and cholesterol screening—along with their Pap smears and breast exams. But non-gynie issues, such as a severe cold or swollen joint, are best left to an internist or family practitioner.

As women mature, screenings multiply in quantity and significance (think fasting-lipid panel, bone density, diabetes). And gynecologists are growing savvier about these tests, Earvolino notes, but she recommends going to an internist for sick visits or screenings, particularly if you have a strong family history of a particular disease.

On the flip side, women who are finished with childbearing may find themselves asking, “Do I

still need my OB-GYN?” Earvolino says many internists offer routine gynecological services like Pap smears and pelvic exams, so older women should feel comfortable sticking with an internist.

What’s boutique health-care?

Much like chichi stores that lure you with one-of-a-kind dresses, boutique medicine (also called “executive medicine”) is a pricier way to get a more customized and exclusive relationship with your doctor.

“In today’s climate, where insurance-plan-physician fees are low, forcing doctors to increase volume and rush patients in and out of the office, it’s impossible to cover all the bases,” says Michael Farber, MD, director of the Executive Health Program at Hackensack University Medical Center in New Jersey. “Boutique care gets you back to old-time medicine, where you got to know your patient very well.”

If you choose to participate, you’ll typically pay a certain amount upfront (anywhere from \$1,500 to \$5,000), which guarantees access to the physician when you’re sick and often includes a full day of testing, diagnostic work, risk assessment, and education designed just for you. For Farber, who is hospital-based, charging a \$1,500-onetime fee per patient per year allows him to limit his practice to three patients a day. A comprehensive medical-and-psychosocial questionnaire is filled out in advance, so the day’s

visit—and accompanying technology—can be mapped out.

A recent full-day visit for Stacey Siffringer, 41, of Franklin Lakes, New Jersey, a patient of Farber’s, included a fasting blood test, breakfast (provided), a chest X-ray, an eye exam, a lung-capacity test, a hearing exam, a full-family-history discussion, a physical, a mammogram, diet-and-exercise counseling, and more. “I said, ‘Sometimes, I get chest pains,’” Siffringer recalls, “and bang—I was upstairs for a stress test.” The culprit: excess caffeine and slight dehydration. Now, Farber sends an e-mail every so often to check Siffringer’s water intake.

“Patients walk out with a total global feel for their health and a plan that’s individually tailored to their lifestyle,” Farber says. If you’re interested, check first with your insurance provider to see if boutique care is covered.

Can my doctor provide good care via e-mail?

This techie trend can help patients and docs stay in touch, but being an overzealous e-patient could also lead to a communication hemorrhage. David Donnersberger Jr., MD, JD, assistant professor of clinical medicine of internal medicine at Northwestern University’s Feinberg School of Medicine—and a physician who uses e-mail occasionally in his practice—says the key is to cultivate a close, ongoing relationship

Health.com

At your last doctor visit:

29%
of you waited longer than 30 minutes for your doctor.

62%
of you spent 15 minutes or less with your doctor.

Have you ever lied to your doc?

19%
of you said **yes**.

What TV show doc team would you most like to be treated by?

16%
chose *Grey’s Anatomy*.
(Marcus Welby, MD was #1!)



Source: Health.com poll

with your doctor and go for regular visits. With such a combination, Donnersberger says, “it’s widely considered ethically and legally appropriate to prescribe medication over the telephone or Internet.”

E-mail might supplant an in-office visit for a suspected yeast infection or an asthma-medication tweak. But don’t try e-mailing a quick photo of a rash, for instance, in hopes of a snappy diagnosis. Most docs will want to examine your whole body. And remember, not all physicians are Web masters: Your doctor can’t diagnose Strep just by asking you to :-p (stick out your tongue, that is). ●