

# 2018 Medical How to Guide



# How to Choose a Cardiologist

**Increasing rates of heart disease and a growing elderly population in the U.S. mean the country's cardiologists are busier than ever.**

These doctors who specialize in treating the heart and its related blood vessels, can treat heart attacks, problems with your heart's rhythm, heart failure and other disturbances, are key to helping you get better cardiovascular health.

A cardiologist can also help you take preventative care of your heart by explaining what heart troubles you are most risk of developing and giving you a plan to protect your body's busiest muscle.

If you're looking for a cardiologist, here are a few things to keep in mind:

## GET A REFERRAL

Usually, a referral from your primary care doctor is the first step in visiting a cardiologist.

If you have a regular doctor, they should have all the information they need to recommend the right heart specialist depending on your concerns. Your doctor will also make sure that the cardiologist is apprised of your medical history.

## ASK AROUND

Talk to your friends, family and colleagues about their experiences with local cardiologists.

They'll be able to tell you the good and bad things they experienced from their cardiologist and can help give you insights that can only come from a first-person testimonial. This will be the best way to learn whether the cardiologist has a friendly staff and a good



bedside manner.

## AREA OF EXPERTISE

What's most important, however, is whether the cardiologist has the right training, qualifications and experience.

Cardiologist must first be certified in internal medicine and then earn an additional certification in cardiology prior to practice following medical school and residency. So, you'll want to be sure yours is board certified.

The American Board of Medical Specialties has set up a website, CertificationMatters.org, where you can search to see which board certifications a doctor holds.

A cardiologist will have different board certifications than a cardiac sur-

geon. Your regular doctor can help you sort it out and pick the best cardiologist for you.

Also consider the cardiologist's specialty. Some cardiologists become experts at one particular procedure by performing and perfecting it over many years. They'll earn a reputation for being experts in that narrow field. Others will diagnose and treat a wide range of heart problems and diseases.

Your personal heart-health needs will determine the kind of cardiologist you should see.

## RESOURCES

Many cardiac procedures require regular visits to check on the condition of your heart over time. And the help

and support you get after any heart procedure is important.

You may need to eat a healthier diet, get regular exercise, quit smoking or lose weight to improve your heart health. These things can be helped through a support group or specialized health program to keep your cardiac rehabilitation on track. Your cardiologist can help facilitate these services after your initial treatment and provide valuable resources to help you care for yourself.

Your unique situation will determine which cardiologists you choose. But getting the right one is vital to ensuring you enjoy your best heart health for years to come.

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**Ghassan Mohsen, M.D.**  
Board Certified in Cardiovascular  
Disease & Internal Medicine



# How to Choose a Medical Clinic

**When it comes to your health, you don't want to take chances. Picking the right medical clinic can yield far-reaching benefits for your mind and body, so shop carefully to find one that can deliver the health services you need in a professional and friendly way.**

Here are some things to consider when choosing a health clinic.

## **CREDENTIALS**

Like with any services in the health-care field, you want to make sure the doctors and nurses at the clinic hold the right credentials to practice in your state.

Check with your state's medical board to make sure your doctor's records are listed there. Most medical boards have a way of searching online to see which degrees and board certifications medical pro-

fessionals hold, making it easy for patients to verify their background and specialties.

The medical staff's experience and reputation in your community matter, too. The best doctors have a long track record of happy patients and good medical outcomes, so ask your friends, family and coworkers about which doctors or clinics they recommend.

## **LISTENING**

Aside from their medical training and experience,

one of the most important things that sets a great medical clinic apart is the staff's ability to listen to your needs.

Clinics are often busy places, with lots of patients who need care and professionals doing important work. The best ones, though, don't make you feel rushed and take the time to make sure your needs are fully being met.

The doctors and nurses at the clinic should make you feel comfortable asking questions and sharing your concerns with them. Listening carefully to your needs doesn't just help them understand your potential medical problems, but it's also a matter of good, old-fashioned customer service.

The best clinics will also be able to help you take care of financial issues. Your clinic should be able to help you understand their payment policies and clearly answer questions about your bills.

## **HIGH STANDARDS**

While most medical clinics can provide the same basic services, the best ones have high expectations for how they run their operation and care for patients. In most cases, after your first visit you'll be able to tell how much pride the clinic takes in its services.

Is the office, including the waiting area, kept clean and organized?

Do the employees and medical staff have a professional appearance and demeanor?

Do they respect your time by keeping appointments on schedule and communicating clearly when there's a delay?

Do the employees seem to enjoy their work?

Well-run clinics value the personal lives of the people who work there, something that can lead to a better overall experience for patients. When you see a clinic that sets high standards for taking care of their staff, they'll be likely to have high standards for how they treat you, too.



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# How to Select the Best Hospital

**Every hospital is a little different from the next, even if they are located in the same community. Ideally, what you want from a hospital is a modern campus stocked with the best technology and staffed by the most qualified personnel.**

You don't want to wait until you fall ill or suffer a medical emergency to learn you've picked the wrong hospital. Take a look at different facilities in your area today, before you need the help.

Here are some factors that can help you choose the best hospital in your city.

Location will play a large role in your choice. The hospital should be close to your home or workplace.

Some people will only have one hospital in their area. Choosing a facility that's out of the way will not only add to travel time, it is simply not practical. After all, when an emergency happens, you will need to get to qualified personnel as soon as possible.

But if you have a medical condition and an alternative facility farther away specializes in it, that hospital might be a good choice.

You will have to balance convenience with your personal circumstances.

Your preferred doctor should have privileges at the facility you choose. Physicians send patients to specific hospitals because it is convenient for them. They are familiar with the site and can use the equipment there. Check with your doctor about where he can work.

Insurance carriers will pay some of the cost of services from a preferred provider, including hospitals. Verify which hospitals are in your carrier's network. If you choose a facility that is not covered by your policy, you run the risk of incurring significant charges.

Another consideration is what other features a hospital may offer. For example, a hospital may be accredited with the Joint Commission, an organization that verifies specific standards of care within medical facilities.

Accreditation means that they are passing frequent performance reviews. You can be confident you



are receiving quality care.

Awards and other certifications indicate that a hospital offers consistent care. The Magnet program recognizes excellence in nursing care and other aspects of hospital work.

Not all hospitals are Magnet certified. In fact, this award is only given to a select few facilities in the country.

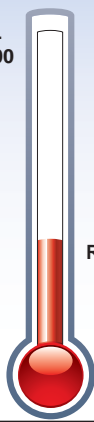
Hospitals often have several areas in which they specialize. For example, two hospitals in the same city may offer care, but one specializes in gastroenterology, while another has an advanced cardiac unit.

Choosing the right hospital for your procedure will ensure you receive the highest level of care. In fact, some hospitals will transfer patients to another facility if it has better equipment and specialists.

Determining the highest quality hospital for your condition will help you achieve the best outcome during instances of illness or injury. Since hospitals offer a variety of care and service types, be sure to analyze all the options before you decide.

By knowing the facts and keeping your own priorities in mind, you will make a wise choice when selecting the hospital that is best for you.

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# How to Choose a Cancer Treatment Center

Everyone has been touched by the terrifying disease that is cancer. Either you received the devastating diagnosis yourself, or someone you know has.



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Cancer is so scary because it's a complex disease. That makes it extremely difficult to manage and almost harder to cure. If you or a loved one has been diagnosed with cancer, it might be hard to explore all of the treatment options without proper guidance.

Patients require expert-level care and lots of support. Choosing the right place to receive treatment may seem overwhelming.

Here are a few things to consider if you need the services of a cancer treatment center.

## DOCTOR

Following a cancer diagnosis, it's extremely important to follow your doctor's advice.

A qualified specialist can guide you through the treatment process, answering questions patiently and accurately. Patients often select doctors based on the type of cancer they have.

Seeking treatment where your specialist practices will be to your advantage because your doctor will have working relationships with other staff people who will assist you during your recovery process.

Insurance coverage is another consideration. Review your policy to verify that your doctor and cancer treatment center are covered by your insurance. Understand the deductibles, co-pays and coverage limits that are already in place. This information will also assist you in the decision-making process.

## LOCATION

Treatment may involve lengthy and repetitive chemotherapy or radiation treatments, so traveling for long periods of time will exhaust your bank account and body. You need to find a quality treatment facility in your local community.

Many people believe that big cancer facilities in large cities will offer better



treatment, but that is not always the case. Depending on your diagnosis and recommended treatment, you may be able to find comparable treatment close to home.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

It will be easy to find first-person recommendations because cancer affects millions of Americans every year.

Ask your network of friends and family who have faced a cancer diagnosis -- or supported loved ones through the process—for recommendations. Many will have advice you may not find online.

Research on the Internet can also be a big help. As you look for local centers, read reviews from patients and loved

ones. Check your local newspaper for centers in your area. Sometimes you may be able to find a promotion or other discount.

## SUPPORT SERVICES

Cancer treatment centers offer a variety of support services for their patients.

That's good, because connecting with others going through the trials of cancer will inspire you on the road to recovery. Centers will also set up counseling sessions for caregivers and people going through similar situations. The help goes beyond medicine for the body and will assist you emotionally and mentally. And studies show that the power of positivity is strong medi-

cine when it comes to treating cancer.

## SPECIALTY TREATMENTS

Specialty cancers centers are on the leading edge of medical research. Depending on your diagnosis and doctor's recommendation, you may be a candidate for clinical trials or experimental treatments at one of these centers.

Ask your doctor about trials or treatments might be effective for your particular type of cancer. And don't be afraid to do your own research and present your findings to your care provider.

Finding a good treatment center as soon as you can following a cancer diagnosis will free you to focus on your recovery.

## Women's Imaging Center Ridgecrest Regional Hospital

### 3D Mammography (Breast Tomosynthesis)



VS



## Early Detection is the Key

Successful treatment and survival rates for breast cancer patients are dramatically affected by early detection of breast cancers. If we find breast cancer early, before it has spread to lymph nodes, the five-year survival rate is almost 100 percent.

While Digital Mammography is still one of the most advanced technologies today, it is only a 2-dimensional picture of the breast.

Breast tomosynthesis is an advanced form of mammography that uses low-dose x-rays for early detection of breast cancer. It helps detect cancer in an early stage, when it is most treatable.

3D Mammography has been shown in clinical studies to be superior to digital mammography.

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# How to Choose a Physician

**For your best health, you need to have a good relationship with your doctor. And if you want to have a good relationship with your doctor, you'll have to start by picking the right one.**

The best doctors are excellent listeners who take patient concerns seriously. But there are some other things you need to consider when feeling out a new doctor's office.

Here are some things to think about:

## **INSURANCE**

Insurance companies have contracts with individuals or group practices. It is likely that you cannot go outside of your insurer's provider network without paying an additional fee.

Your primary care doctor should be able to understand your medical needs, as well as offer you appropriate referrals should you need a specialist.

It is possible that using a doctor outside your insurer's primary care network may subject you to out-of-pocket expenses.

Some insurance carriers do not impose restrictions on your choice of physicians. If you have this kind of policy, look to your local newspaper or online advertisements to find potential doctors in your area.

## **MEETING YOUR NEEDS**

Experts recommend selecting a general practitioner to serve as your primary care physician. This professional might be an internal medicine doctor or a member of a family practice.

Under some circumstances, it is better to select a doctor practicing within a particular specialty.

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physician/gynecologist (OB/GYN) as a primary care physician. A pediatrician might be the primary care physician for children. Seniors could even have a geriatric specialist for their primary care physician.

#### ASK FOR REFERRALS

Friends, family and other trusted sources are the best way to find a new doctor. People will gladly give referrals when they have had positive experiences with their health care providers. They will also provide feedback when the experience was not to their liking.

The American Medical Association or other professional physicians' organizations in your area will

be another useful resource.

Prior to making a final decision, always confirm that your physician has a current license to practice with the state medical board. This licensing body will also tell you if he has any pending disciplinary action or complaints.

Not every doctor accepts new patients. Once you have collected a list of possible physicians, contact them to make sure they will accept new patients, as well as the insurance you carry.

Ideally, your first visit will include a routine physical examination and documentation of your medical history. But sometimes insurance carriers will decline payment for routine exams.

#### CONVENIENCE

Convenience is another important factor when choosing a physician. His or her office should be easily accessible from your home or workplace.

Ensure the doctor has admitting privileges at your preferred hospital in the event you need treatment.

Ask where your physician can perform diagnostic tests and procedures. Some doctors might use a separate facility rather than their own offices.

Finally, inquire how long it usually takes to book an appointment. When an emergency arises, you will want to know that your new doctor can meet you quickly.



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# How to Choose Alzheimer's Care

**More than five million people in the United States live with Alzheimer's. That number is expected to double in the next 25 years. In fact, every 67 seconds a new case is diagnosed.**

Hearing the news that you or a loved one has Alzheimer's or dementia is a devastating, radically life altering experience. And your first step upon diagnosis should be considering where to find the finest level of professional care available. A good provider will not only administer phenomenal medical care, but will do so with a special focus on treating patients with dignity and respect as they face the most frightening time in their lives.

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A TREATMENT FACILITY

The best care facilities are dedicated to treating Alzheimer's and dementia. The staff in these facilities will have been trained to handle a number of medical problems with special consideration to mental difficulties associated with these diseases. Inquire about the staff requirements at each center, as well as online or continuing education opportunities.

The care facility should conduct evaluations to determine where your loved one falls in the Alzheimer's spectrum -- beginning, middle or end stage. The care they give will fit the personal needs of the individual.

After the initial assessment, the facility should be assessed on a regular basis, as individual needs can change according to the symptoms experienced. People in the beginning stages of the disease might still maintain limited independence while others in end-stage dementia need around-the-clock care and attention. The center should be

able to adapt to the changing needs.

How is the living environment at the facility? Are the rooms clean and comfortable? Are there quiet areas for reading? Do outdoor activities inspire activity? Patients need to feel comfortable and safe. The best facilities offer cozy atmospheres where your loved one can feel at ease.

Professionals who care for Alzheimer and dementia patients know the support of family and friends can have a huge impact. You should have ample opportunities for family visits,

activities and outings that include family and friends.

When choosing a residential facility, tour the entire center. Ask to see a model resident room, and if permitted, ask to speak to some residents or family members.

Does the center have group activities, special outings and other services? Quality centers provide supervised picnics, fitness and craft classes, religious events and even field trips to enhance the care of the residents. Active people stay healthier longer.

The facility should not feel like a locked hospital ward or a boot camp, but should have security and protective measures in place. Your loved one should be treated with dignity and respect.

Some centers have a pet therapy program for animal lovers and people who have left pets behind.

When you find the right care for your loved one, you can be assured of their safety, health and happiness. And you can enjoy peace of mind knowing they are safe and well cared for.



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## ALZHEIMER'S CAREGIVER Support Group

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# How to Choose an OB-GYN

**Pregnancy is a magical and life changing event. It can also be stressful as you make plans for your new addition's birth. But by choosing the right care providers and having a thorough pregnancy plan, you can avoid a great deal of unnecessary and unhealthy stress.**

Choosing the right obstetrician and gynecologist (OB-GYN) is one of the first decisions expectant mothers need to make. These care providers will guide you from the first days of your pregnancy until your child's birth. They'll also follow up after birth to make sure that mom is happy and healthy.

If you have a baby on the way, or you're planning a pregnancy in the near future, here are some considerations for selecting expert care providers.

## GET RECOMMENDATIONS

Chances are you have any friends, family members or co-workers with growing families; and they'll usually be happy to share their experiences with you and recommend an OB-GYN for you to use — or one to avoid.

Experience and training are obviously the most important aspects of choosing any medical professional, but personal references can give you other insights, too. The doctor should have a personality and bedside manner that makes you feel comfortable asking questions, and they should be able to communicate with you clearly and completely.

Getting these insights from new mothers will help you know what to expect from different OB-GYNs in your area.

## CHECK YOUR INSURANCE

Another important consideration is which doctors and hospitals are covered by your insurance plan.

Your ability to shop for doctors will vary widely depending on your particular policy. Some insurance plans have a large network of OB-GYNs to pick from, but others may only give you one or two local choices unless you're willing to pay higher — and in some cases, dramatically higher — out-of-network fees to pick a different doctor.



For most people, choosing an in-network provider is critical, so check with your insurance company early in the process.

## BIRTH LOCATION

For some expecting mothers, the location of their birth is a major consideration. If you have a particular hospital or birthing center in mind for your delivery, make sure your OB-GYN is authorized to work there.

Most obstetricians have admitting privileges to just one hospital, so picking your OB-GYN means you'll be choosing the place you'll be giving birth, too. Look carefully into the services your doctor's hospital provides to make sure it meets your expectations.

## THE DELIVERY

Because every delivery is different — often happening at unexpected times and occasionally with complications that can't be predicted — it's hard to know what your delivery will be like with any precision.

The OB-GYN who delivers your baby, for example, may not be the one who did all your pregnancy care. There's no way of knowing whether your OB-GYN will be the one on call when you go into labor.

That's an important question to ask, though, and the answer will often depend on how large the OB-GYN's practice is. For a small practice, with only one or two doctors, you'll be very likely to know the doctor who delivers your baby. But even if you choose an individual practitioner who typically personally attends your delivery, ask about their backup plan if they happen to be sick, on vacation or busy with another patient in labor at the same time your baby is coming. You should know what to expect.

In the end, all these factors should come together to make you comfortable and happy about your decision. Asking lots of questions and picking a great OB-GYN will help make sure you have a happy and healthy childbirth experience.

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# How to Choose a Dermatologist

**Don't pick a dermatologist at random using the internet or phone book. Spend plenty of time doing research about skincare professionals in your area to get a good understanding of their specialties and track record dealing with patients.**

You may be surprised to learn that dermatologists are not all alike.

Here are a few things to consider:

## **SPECIALTY DERMATOLOGY**

A dermatologist is a doctor who specializes in treating skin conditions, but their work can fall into many sub-specialties that may or may not match your health needs.

All certified dermatologists earn their medical degrees and undergo three more years of post-residency specialty training on helping patients with skin, hair and nails. Many dermatologists have general prac-

tices and are open to seeing patients with a wide variety of skin concerns, from acne and skin diseases to facial wrinkles.

Many other dermatologists, though, focus their attention and training on narrower aspects of dermatology such as cosmetics, surgery or conditions that affect children.

## **CONSULTATIONS**

Most dermatologists will be willing to consult with you on your first visit for a flat fee, and they may be willing to apply this fee toward a procedure if you decide to move forward with it. It doesn't hurt to ask.

At your consultation, you'll want to learn more about the dermatologist, including personality, experience level and aggressiveness about procedures and treatments. Some doctors will have different plans of action, particularly for cosmetic issues, so it's a good idea to let them know your concerns and see what path they recommend for you going forward.

Listening is the most important thing you can do during a consultation. You may have interest in a particular procedure that you had read about in magazines or on the Internet, but let the doctor make a recommendation first. This will give you some insight into their style of practice.

## **CERTIFICATIONS**

Find out what certifications the dermatologist holds. You can often find that information on the doctor's web site, and you can also double-check it with the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) online at [aad.org](http://aad.org).

The AAD keeps a database of dermatologists who are certified to practice in the United States. You can check that your doctor is board certified and see a listing of their specialties by searching online.

## **PROCEDURES**

If you're going to the dermatologist for a specific procedure, you should look for a doctor who has plenty of experience in it. Some of the best dermatologists will do the same procedure several times per day, keeping their skills sharp and making them experts at performing it.

You should also ask who is going to perform the procedure. In some cases, a nurse or assistant will perform it under the doctor's supervision. In other cases, the doctor will personally perform it with their own hands.

You should know up front who will be doing the procedure so that you're comfortable with your decision.



  
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**DR. LASHGARI, M.D.**

Dr. Lashgari is a board-certified dermatologist and a member of the American Academy of Dermatology. Dr. Lashgari has had his own private practice since 1999 and is excited to join Ridgecrest Regional Hospital and bring his expertise in dermatology, dermatologic surgery, and cosmetic surgery services to the Ridgecrest community.

FOR AN APPOINTMENT PLEASE CALL (760) 499-7260



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# How to Choose a Skilled Nursing Facility for Your Loved One

**Skilled nursing facilities provide personalized care to residents who are suffering from advanced age, severe illness or infirmity.**

If you're searching for a skilled nursing facility for a loved one you have hundreds of options to pick from. The problem is, it can be difficult to sort through all of your options.

Your best choices are facilities that have high scores from state agencies such as the nursing-home regulatory agency or department of health. The nursing staff in these facilities are required to complete a formal certification process.

As a result, the staff at a nursing facility is usually much more skilled and regulated than staff at an assisted living facility. That's because the staff at skilled nursing facilities provide and administer prescription medications. Assisted living facility staff does not usually have the same authorization.

Your loved one will need reassurance that he or she will be safe and well taken care of by a highly skilled nursing staff.

Select a facility close to your loved one's family and friends. It should be easy to see your loved one. Frequent visits will help ease the transition from independent living to a skilled nursing environment.

You can form an accurate opinion by visiting several facilities. Reputable centers will have no problems with scheduling interviews with staff or giving tours of the living areas and grounds. If a facility doesn't allow you to see these areas or have a meeting with the director, it should be dropped from your list.

Cleanliness, cheerful decor and happy residents neatly dressed are sym-



bols of a quality facility.

Speak to current residents and their families to get a good assessment of the facility. Family members will likely provide the most unbiased and unvarnished opinion of the facility.

Most high-quality skilled nursing facilities are significant investments. They provide a much higher level of care and so they cost more. Talk with an

attorney who specializes in nursing facility cases for advice on cost, as well as quality of care.

The decision to put your loved one in a particular facility is not permanent. If your family member is not receiving good care or shows signs of abuse, you have the right to remove him or her. Frequent visits are important so you can monitor the health and well-being

of your loved one. See him or her at different times of the day to verify the level of care.

Take all the time you need when searching for a skilled nursing facility.

Putting a loved one in a facility can be difficult and emotionally challenging. Finding the best one you can afford will give you peace of mind.



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