

Dr. Who?

Who is your doctor? Many people cannot answer that question because they do not have a family – or primary care – doctor. Not having a doctor who knows you and your medical history can be bad for your health. It also adds to the rising cost of healthcare for all of us.

Each year millions of Americans use emergency rooms (ERs) for routine medical care instead of visiting their primary care doctor. This is one of the main reasons healthcare costs are increasing. An average ER visit costs a great deal more than an average doctor's office visit. Unnecessary ER visits can delay care for people with true emergencies, and increase costs for all of us.

One of the best ways to help reduce healthcare costs is to know your doctor, and make sure he or she knows you. Here are other steps you should take:

- Share your personal and family medical history with your doctor.
- Tell your doctor about all the medicines you take, even over-the-counter drugs and herbal remedies.
- Practice preventive care. Visit your doctor regularly, not just when you are sick. These regularly scheduled visits can help you stay healthy. Keep up with periodic screenings and tests recommended for people of your age, gender and risk factors.
- Ask your doctor about steps you can take to avoid illness and manage chronic conditions.
- When you see the doctor, come prepared. Make notes about your health concerns and any symptoms you have. Bring a list of questions to your appointment. Write down the answers, your diagnosis and any instructions. Don't be afraid to call later with other questions.
- Keep track of your child's immunizations. Make sure you don't miss important shots that protect your children from disease. For every dollar spent on a vaccine, up to \$30 is saved toward the cost of treating such diseases as mumps, measles, rubella and polio.

Having an ongoing relationship with a primary care doctor can help keep everyone in your family healthy and keep healthcare affordable for all Americans. By making smart decisions about your health, you play an important role in managing the national cost of healthcare.

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