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Internal Medicine

Internist Role

A physician specializing in internal medicine treats people who are not in the pediatric age group. Most Internists typically see adults who are 18 years and older. Many Internists act as primary care provider for adults.

Training and Credentials

The training to be an Internist consists of three years spent learning and managing problems related to the internal organs. This period is called an internship and residency. After the training period, most Internists will become certified by the [American Board of Internal Medicine](#). Internists who excel in the field of Internal Medicine can become Fellows of the [American College of Physicians](#) (FACP). Internists often will continue their training by concentrating on one internal organ and become a specialist in that area. For example, a cardiologist studies the heart, a pulmonologist studies the lung, and a nephrologist studies the kidney. In Virginia, all physicians must be licensed by the [Virginia Department of Health Professions, Board of Medicine](#). Licenses need to be renewed every two years.

Preparing for the Visit

The Internist will be your primary health care provider and gatekeeper to specialists. Therefore, it's very important that the relationship that you have with your Internist be a good one. The best way to find a good Internist is by word of mouth. You may also search the [SeniorNavigator website Quick Search](#) using the topic "Internist" and your zip code to find an Internist in your community.

The first visit is a good time for you and the doctor to discuss goals and expectations. The following issues are important:

- Discussing the physician's training and background will help you understand more about the philosophy and foundation of the doctor's practice. By asking whether your doctor holds any certifications, such as that of [Geriatrician](#), you will understand more about his or her approach to health care.
- Use your evaluation skills to see if he/she is a good teacher.
- Observe the doctor's bedside manner and see if the doctor meets your expectations.
- Your physician will not be available 24 hours a day, so ask about coverage when your doctor is unavailable. The practice should always have someone on call.
- Before each appointment give some thought to the health questions that are most important to you and prioritize them. The more specific you are with your questions, the better the answers will be.
- If you feel you need more time to discuss questions with your doctor, call ahead to schedule a consultation. That way, your doctor can devote time to sit down and talk with you about specific issues.
- If your doctor cannot answer your questions during your visit, ask if you may call back to speak to the nurse or physician assistant.

The typical office visit is problem-focused; at that time, the exam will pertain only to those problems that are included in your chief complaint. The yearly physical exam will be focused on preventative medicine.

Costs and Coverage

Medicare Part B will usually cover 80% of the bill. You are responsible for the remaining 20% of the approved amount of the bill, or your medicare supplemental policy will cover, after your deductible has been satisfied. Medicare Advantage programs will usually cover the visit except for any copay obligations. There are also many prevention screenings that Medicare will now cover, so refer to the latest [Medicare & You 2024 benefit handbook](#), or ask your doctor during your next visit.

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