Script – Print – Taking the proper steps in finding a pediatrician for your baby

You're pregnant, and it won't be long before you're ready to welcome your new bundle of joy. You've got your check list covered, but you still need to find a pediatrician.

So, how do you go about finding the best one for you and your child?

According to Chasity Caperton, MD, a pediatrician at OSF HealthCare, the best time to start looking is three months before your baby is due. That will give you enough time to research your options.

If you're new to the area where you live, start by searching for pediatricians on your insurance company's website or contact the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). Most pediatricians' offices make time for expectant parents to visit. Call the office to set up an appointment.

There are several factors to consider when looking for a pediatrician, says Dr. Caperton.

"You have to look at the practice as a whole," she says. "Are they taking new patients? Some practices might not be for some reason. Do they take your insurance? That's very important. And check the availability of the doctors. What hours are they open? Are they open on weekends?"

A family might choose a pediatrician, or they could decide to use a family practice physician. But doctors aren't the only people in a pediatrics office who care for children. Nurse practitioners (NPs) and physician assistants (PAs) also see young patients. They are trained to give shots, examine children for health problems and prescribe medicines — just like a doctor can do.

"A family physician sees patients from birth to end of life; they have the full age spectrum. A pediatrician specializes in birth to age 18 or 21, but it depends on the practice. They have more in-depth knowledge, especially when it comes to behavioral and developmental issues," says Dr. Caperton. "Oftentimes, a family physician will refer a child with complex medical issues to a pediatrician, due to this in-depth knowledge."

Make a list of questions

When meeting with a prospective pediatrician, make sure you are prepared with questions. "You should ask anything you want to ask," says Dr. Caperton. "Are our personalities going to mesh? Because that is very important."

Other topics you might want to cover are breastfeeding, the use of antibiotics and other medicines and vaccines.

"I believe that vaccines are very important. There is a lot of misinformation out there from various sources," says Dr. Caperton. "I would urge every parent to talk to their provider about vaccines. The provider can give you more in-depth studies if you want. You can discuss the risk and the benefits."

Dr. Caperton adds that not every pediatrician is going to be the right fit for your family. And that's OK. That's why it's important to meet and discuss key issues.

Asking friends and family for referrals is a good place to start, but it shouldn't be your main resource. If you know someone who didn't hit it off with their pediatrician, it doesn't mean you and your child won't.

"The ideal fit would be if you feel comfortable talking to them about everything," says Dr. Caperton. "You're not having to censor your words. They are listening to what you say. They are empathetic to what you're saying. They take you seriously. That, to me, is a good fit."

The bottom line is simple. Choosing the right pediatrician will help you feel confident about your baby's care.

"I want people to know that every office is different. Every provider is different," Dr. Caperton emphasizes. "Decide what is important to you in regards of care to your child. Do your research and make sure you visit the office."

Here are some things to consider as you decide which pediatrician is right for your family. *

- Is the pediatrician's office conveniently located? Is it easily accessible by car or public transportation?
- Are the office hours convenient for your schedule? If you are a working parent, you might want evening or weekend hours.
- What is the doctor's policy on taking and returning phone calls? Is there a nurse in the office who can answer routine questions? Do they prefer to use OSF MyChart to communicate?
- Do you sense a sincere interest by the doctor in your child's problems, including any health issues they might have?
- How are visits for acute illnesses handled? For example, can you make an appointment on short notice if your child needs to see the pediatrician because of a cold, sore throat or ear infection?
- Does the doctor communicate clearly to explain illnesses and treatments, and ensure that all your questions are answered?

*Source American Academy of Pediatrics

For more information on pediatrics, visit the OSF HealthCare website.