

PRINT-Are You Treating Your Car Better Than Your Body? Why You Need a Primary Care Provider

Lots of people are strict about getting an oil change for their car or making sure their tires are rotated after so many miles to prevent an accident but they pay far less attention to how well their body is prepared to run well.

The fact is, fewer adults are seeking primary care. A [Kaiser Family Foundation study](#) found nearly one fourth of all adults and nearly half of Americans under 30 don't have a primary health care provider. This trend came before the COVID-19 pandemic which has kept some people from seeking care in a medical facility.

Merle Hall had not seen anyone regularly for his health in a few years. The 63 year-old from Bradford, a small town (pop 787) north of Peoria, said after his primary care doctor moved he just never bothered to find someone else until he got a scare during a recent visit to the dentist.

"By having the dentist tell me, 'You have high blood pressure,' that was a little bit of a wake-up call. I've known different people who've had strokes and things and didn't want to have that in my own life obviously and then my wife pushed me a little bit too and that got me to come to make an appointment with the doctor and get back into medical visits again," he shared.

Family Medicine Physician Andy Peterson at OSF HealthCare in Kewanee says most people seek out primary care *after* they've had some sort of health scare or suffered an acute medical event such as a heart attack or stroke. But, Dr. Peterson says regular health check-ups, at least once a year for healthy people without a chronic condition, can keep you feeling better longer by focusing on prevention.

"Unfortunately, patients don't always think of it that way. They think of it as, 'I'm feeling fine. I don't need to see a doctor.' But Peterson stresses, "There's a lot of things we can do to help you live the longest, happiest, healthy life you can before there's any problem."

Merle Hall admits he probably should have kept up routine primary care visits and he might have been able to avoid developing high blood pressure.

"Get over the fact that hey you're not invincible and that things do happen to good people and so you just need to bite the bullet and go in and do it. Not everyone enjoys it but it's just one of those things in life that you've got to do," he advised based on his own experience.

You Need Someone Who Knows You

Dr. Peterson says a primary care provider is also a better, more trusted source than what you might find on the Internet or as he joked, Dr. Google. He often spends time with patients answering questions about what they've seen or heard elsewhere, especially when it comes to nutritional supplements.

"There are new ones every day. Sometimes if I don't have the knowledge, I will try to let them know and look into it a little bit for them to make sure that what we're doing is safe because nothing is without risk. Every over-the-counter product, every supplement does have potential risk and we need to be aware of that when we talk about using it in a patient."

Many millennials are turning to urgent care centers because of their convenience but Dr. Peterson says that's not a good substitute for regular care from a trusted relationship with a provider who knows your medical history and understands you well enough to know when there's perhaps a bigger problem than just the sore throat that prompted you to be seen.

"It's hard to accurately diagnose and assess a patient when you don't know them at all; when you don't know anything about their health history and you've never done an exam on them before. Good medical care comes from recurrent evaluations, recurrent assessments, recurrent physical exams and I think that's why it's important to have a primary care provider so when you really are ill, they're going to have the best sense of what might be wrong and what can help you best," he suggested.

Primary care providers also know the proper schedule for screenings and vaccinations and in rural areas, in particular, they're prepared to manage chronic conditions and patients of all ages, from babies to Baby Boomers and beyond. But, here's the most compelling reason to start making and keeping appointments like many people do for their cars – research shows [people are healthier](#) when they see a primary care doctor, rather than a specialist for their routine care and [mortality rates are lower](#) in areas with a higher population of primary care physicians.

OSF HealthCare has also ramped up the availability of video visits which can be scheduled online. For new patients, providers would want an initial in-person visit but online follow-ups could be a convenient option. [Advance practice providers](#) are also giving access to important primary care and you can find an option in your area [here](#).