



# In search of Dr Right

Finding the right paediatrician for you can take some time and effort

BY CAMILLA RANKIN WITH DR JESS MEDDOWS-TAYLOR

**F**inding a doctor that you and your children trust and are comfortable with is vital – after all you are likely to go through thick and thin with this person. General practitioner (GP) and mom to three young girls, Dr Jess Meddows-Taylor, shares her views on finding Dr Right.

## WHEN IT'S A CHOICE

Most babies will be seen within a few days of birth by the paediatrician (paed) who is on duty at the hospital or birth clinic where they were born, and for the most part moms stick with this doctor for good. But like any relationship forged in the heat of the moment, this is not enough of a reason to be loyal and stick it out if you are unhappy. As Dr Jess says, “Unless the baby is born with any specific medical problems where it is important to have a doctor that has been involved from the start, then make a clean break and go to the paed or GP that you had researched before your baby was born.”

## WHEN LOOKING FOR DR RIGHT

**1** If you have a family doctor or GP already, then ask them to refer you to a paed that they work closely with. It is much more time and cost efficient to visit your GP first, who if necessary will refer you to a paed. It is also usually easier to get an appointment with a GP, and often if you do need a paed appointment, you are likely to be taken more seriously if you tell them you have been referred by your GP.



**2** Look for a paed that is based at a hospital near you – you don't want to be driving forty minutes with a sick and wailing child, or turned away because your paed is not based there.

**3** Speak to friends and family about the paed they use and love, and why. Be sure to ask about waiting times and his or her availability after hours or in an emergency.

**4** Look for a paed with a partner at the practice that you also like. This way there is always a doctor on call if you need one.

**5** Find out if the doctor has a specific specialty, if so, ask if they can refer you to a general paed. Many specialist

## Your baby is sick: GP or paed?

**Once you have established a relationship with both a GP and a paed, then knowing who to take your child to when she is not feeling great is easy. The general rule of thumb, says GP and mom of three girls, Dr Jess Meddows-Taylor, is as follows:**

- If your baby is six weeks old or younger and has a rash, a temperature over 39°C, vomiting or diarrhoea, seems to have difficulty in breathing, is lethargic or agitated and has missed more than one feed (not had a feed in eight hours), then take her directly to your paed. Very young babies can deteriorate very quickly, and going through your GP may

waste valuable time in these instances.

- If your baby is older than six weeks then call your GP first. Your GP should be able to give you a telephonic consultation and advise you if your child will need to go to the paed or come in for a GP appointment.
- If your child has been involved in an emergency such as an accident, is choking, has severe cuts, or has impaled herself on something, then you need to go immediately to your closest hospital casualty, preferably one with a paed on call. Paeds are not surgeons, so will not be able to help in an emergency situation.

REMEMBER THAT ONCE YOU HAVE CHOSEN A PAED, YOU ARE NOT BOUND TO THAT PERSON FOREVER. YOU ARE ENTITLED TO GET A SECOND OPINION

paeds prioritise the patients that fall into their speciality, understandably, leaving more general cases to wait.

**6** Most importantly interview a number of paediatricians before your baby arrives. Dr Jess points out: "Your doctor needs to be approachable, available, you need to agree with their practice and philosophy and you need to connect with them and their particular bedside manner." These issues can only be assessed in person. For the most part, go with your gut.

### MAKING THE BREAK

It is important to remember that once you have chosen a paediatrician, you are not bound to that person forever. You are entitled to get a second (third, or even fourth) opinion. "Medicine is a subjective science," explains Dr Jess, "and there is never only one way of managing a medical situation. You can look for alternatives and try different doctors." If the relationship is not working, you can leave. If you do leave, you are entitled to the pertinent information in your file, although not the file itself because it belongs to the doctor. ●

### Take responsibility...

...for your child's health with this tip from Dr Jess:

Buy an A4 notebook when your child is born. When your child is ill, make a note of her symptoms such as her temperature, the time and what medication you gave. All this info is important so that your doctor can get the full picture of your child's health. When you visit your doctor, write down any instructions, as well as the diagnosis, in the book, and if you have a prescription ask the pharmacist for a copy so that you can staple it into the book. This will ensure that everyone is on board and especially if you need to visit a new doctor for some reason, he or she will be able to get an overview of your child's health and treat her more comprehensively.



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