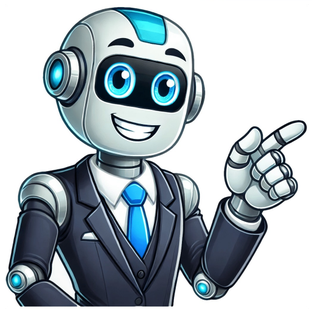
I'm not a robot



You've read an article online and the author makes some claims that you wonder about. Something doesn't sound quite right. But the article was written by someone with the prefix "Dr." in front of their name, so it must be true, right? The use of the title "Dr." means that the person has completed an advanced degree program. While it often refers to an M.D. or a Ph.D., it can legitimately be used by many others. Generally, three to four years are required beyond a bachelor's degree, and an internship or residency may be required. Here are some of the U.S. and Canadian doctoral degrees: M.D.: Medical Doctor. Psychiatrists are usually M.D.s, although some are D.O.s. See below. Ph.D.: Doctor of Philosophy. This is the traditional academic doctorate. A Ph.D. is qualified to teach at a college or university. Psychologists often have this degree. In psychology, a Ph.D. can be in clinical psychology, with a focus on research and practice, counseling psychology, with a focus on practice in less pathological populations, school psychology, although many school psychologists do not get a doctorate, or just psychology, which many experimental and social psychologists at colleges have. You can also get a Ph.D. in social work, nursing, and even things like English, mathematics, and philosophy. Psy.D.: Doctor of Psychology. This is a clinical psychology degree that places more emphasis on practice than research. Psy.D. programs developed to train practitioners who would keep up with research but might never do much research themselves. D.O.: Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine. Osteopathic physicians generally get the same residency training as M.D. physicians. Their medical schools include additional training in physical manipulation techniques somewhat similar to chiropractic. D.D.S.: Doctor of Dental Surgery. A dentist. D.S.W.: Doctor of Social Work. An advanced social work degree often held by educators in social work. Ed.D.: Doctor of Education. Many schools of education confer this degree. A recipient can be a psychologist, an educational administrator or someone in another education-related field. DC: Doctor of Chiropractic. A chiropractor. D.Min.: Doctor of Ministry. A minister, possibly a doctoral-level pastoral counselor, but not always. Th.D. or D.Div. are also used. J.D.: Doctor of Jurisprudence. An attorney. Some mental health professionals also have law degrees. If you read an article which is written by a "doctor," and the author does not specify what type of doctor they are, then be skeptical. One prominent example is the popular "Doctor Laura" on the radio. She is not a psychologist nor a psychiatrist. Her doctorate, in fact, is in physiology and she is licensed as an M.F.C.C. This does not mean that she can't give helpful advice, it means that her doctorate is not in psychiatry or psychology. Be careful out there! A master's degree involves a shorter training program, often around two years past the undergraduate bachelor's degree. Relevant degrees include: M.S.W.: Master in Social Work. This is the traditional degree for social workers. L.C.S.W.: A person has passed the licensing exam that comes after the degree. It allows for more independent practice. M.Ed.: Master in Education. Many counselors have this degree or a similar one, M.S.Ed. is given by schools of education in almost any field of education. Many states also license counselors as L.P.C., Licensed Professional Counselor. M.S. or M.A.: Master of Science or Master of Arts. These are the traditional degrees given by colleges of arts and sciences. A psychologist generally needs a doctorate to be licensed. Some Canadian provinces licensed psychologists with a master's degree. 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Psychologists can also become board-certified, but this is an extra credential that many psychologists do not get. The American Board of Professional Psychology allows psychologists who pass their test to use these initials. F.A.C.P.: is a Fellow of the American College of Physicians B.C.F.E.: American Board of Forensic Examiners. Quick: when you hear the word doctor, what do you picture? Most would probably describe someone in a white lab coat with a stethoscope hanging around their neck or someone in medical scrubs—someone you would seek out if you have a deep cut that needed stitches. That word doctor, however, is a title assigned to many who don't come close to that description, many of whom you wouldn't want stitching up that cut. Take your English professor, for instance. No offense, Dr. Barrett. 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The initials M and D stem from the Latin title Medicīnae Doctor. There are many different types of doctors, with different specialties, but if you have a physical ailment, visiting a doctor with the initials M.D. is a good place to start. Specialty doctors may add even more initials to their title, such as DCN (doctor of clinical nutrition), DDS (doctor of dental surgery), or countless others they acquire with additional training. To make things even more confusing, some may add abbreviations from medical associations they belong to, such as FAAEM (Fellow of the American Academy of Emergency Medicine). As for Ph.D., this stands for "doctor of philosophy." It stems from the Latin term Philosophiae Doctor. You can get a Ph.D. in any number of subjects, from anthropology to mythological studies. It's not an easy feat, however, as to earn one, you must do original research and write a dissertation. Ph.D. vs. M.D.: are these synonyms? There are two big differences between Ph.D.s and M.D.s. When it comes to medicine, M.D.s can prescribe medications, and Ph.D.s can't. And yes, it's possible to be both an M.D. and a Ph.D. In fact, some med schools offer programs in which you can achieve both simultaneously. You can also get a professional doctorate degree in a number of fields. For example, you might receive a doctorate of education, an Ed.D. So, in a nutshell, both M.D.s and Ph.Ds can be referred to as doctors. If you're looking for someone to treat what ails you physically, then you want at least an M.D. following their name. If you want to dig deep into a subject and get advice from someone who has done their own research and who likely knows the latest and greatest developments in a particular area, then you're probably looking for a Ph.D. And if someone has both, even better—depending on your needs, it may be just what the doctor ordered. Want more synonyms? Get Thesaurus.com's sizzling synonyms right in your inbox! Quick: when you hear the word doctor, what do you picture? Most would probably describe someone in a white lab coat with a stethoscope hanging around their neck or someone in medical scrubs—someone you would seek out if you have a deep cut that needed stitches. That word doctor, however, is a title assigned to many who don't come close to that description, many of whom you wouldn't want stitching up that cut. Take your English professor, for instance. No offense, Dr. Barrett. It can all be a bit confusing, which is why it's important to know who and why someone might be called a doctor, as well as what all those initials and abbreviations after their name mean. Here we break it all down. What does Dr. mean? Let's start with doctor or Dr. for short. While the first definition of the word is "a person licensed to practice medicine," that doesn't mean you want to take medical advice from anyone who calls themselves a doctor. 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An attorney. Some mental health professionals also have law degrees. If you read an article which is written by a "doctor," and the author does not specify what type of doctor they are, then be skeptical. One prominent example is the popular "Doctor Laura" on the radio. She is not a psychologist nor a psychiatrist. Her doctorate, in fact, is in physiology and she is licensed as an M.F.C.C. This does not mean that she can't give helpful advice, it means that her doctorate is not in psychiatry or psychology. Be careful out there! A master's degree involves a shorter training program, often around two years past the undergraduate bachelor's degree. Relevant degrees include: M.S.W.: Master in Social Work. This is the traditional degree for social workers. L.C.S.W.: A person has passed the licensing exam that comes after the degree. It allows for more independent practice. M.Ed.: Master in Education. 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With so many types of healthcare providers and so many acronyms, you may find that even regular checkups involve a several providers, each with specialized training and skills. There's a good reason why all these experts play a role in your health. As I've learned first-hand over many years specializing in emergency medicine: team-based care results in better healthcare. Research has demonstrated that teamwork really does make the dream work when it comes to health. When providers with diverse training and experience work together, adverse events happen less often—patients feel more satisfied and demonstrate better outcomes. MedStar Health employs team-based approaches because we've seen the benefits for our patients and providers first-hand. Let's take a moment to introduce you to the members of the team and clear up what the most common acronyms mean. Physicians. A physician is a doctor who is trained to practice medicine. After earning a bachelor's degree, physicians typically study for four years at a medical school. Then they spend another three to seven years in a residency program designed to help them get experience and apply the lessons learned in medical school, much like an extended apprenticeship. Following their residency, some physicians receive additional sub-specialty training in a fellowship program, which can last from one to three years. While the terms "physician," "doctor," and "MD" are often seen as the same thing, not all physicians hold the same degree. And not all healthcare providers with a doctorate degree are physicians. Optometrists, pharmacists, and others earn advanced degrees but do not attend medical school. Doctor of Medicine (MD). The Doctor of Medicine degree indicates a physician is trained to diagnose and treat illnesses and disorders with preventative care and evidence-based therapies such as medications and surgery. This allopathic training is the most common education for doctors, with about 66% of physicians in the U.S. holding the MD degree. Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (DO). The Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine receives similar training to an MD. DOs take an additional 200 hours of osteopathic training to learn how illness impacts the musculoskeletal system and how to provide treatment by manipulating the joints, bones, and muscles. Both MDs and DOs are licensed nationally, and you will receive excellent care from a physician with either degree. What about surgeons? All surgeons are physicians, but not all physicians are surgeons. After graduating from medical school, some new physicians will choose an accredited residency program in an area of practice such as pediatrics, internal medicine, neurology, or many others. During the residency program, physicians practice under the close supervision of an experienced provider. Some choose to practice general surgery, treating conditions and diseases of the abdomen, breast, head and neck, blood vessels, and digestive tract. Others choose to specialize in a field that includes surgical practice such as thoracic (chest), orthopedic (muscle and skeleton), or oncologic (cancer) surgery for example. Surgeons perform many duties that are similar to those of physicians, and they also use surgical techniques to treat conditions and restore function. Advanced Practice Providers. Physicians aren't the only experts providing care, of course. Healthcare teams are made up of people with a range of expertise and experience, including a group known as Advance Practice Providers that includes those with advanced degrees who are not physicians. Our healthcare system relies on the expertise of these providers to deliver excellent patient care in a wide range of specialties. Some of the most common APPs include: Physician Assistant (PA). PAs are medical professionals who can serve as your primary healthcare provider. They earn a master's degree and are licensed by state boards to practice medicine. PAs can diagnose illnesses, manage treatment plans, and prescribe medications while practicing under the supervision of physicians in a number of specialties. Nurse Practitioner (NP). NPs are registered nurses who take advanced graduate education and clinical training that prepares to practice independently in collaboration with or under the supervision of physicians. They to manage a wide range of health services, such as: Diagnosing and managing medical conditions Ordering and interpreting diagnostic tests Prescribing medications Initiating treatment plans Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist (CRNA). CRNAs are advanced practice nurses who satisfy rigorous requirements to be state credentialed. They work with other healthcare professionals to provide anesthesia care for all types of surgeries and procedures. Certified Nurse Midwife (CNM). CNMs take advanced education and clinical training with an emphasis on pregnancy, childbirth, reproductive, and gynecologic health. They are state licensed to prescribe a full range of medications and treatments for women and girls of all ages and backgrounds. Many work closely with obstetricians, gynecologists, or maternal-fetal medicine specialists. They are often important components of the birthing team and are trained in medical techniques unlike some birth support specialists such as doulas. Nurses. Nurses are often some of the first providers patients see at our clinics and hospitals. Like physicians and APPs, nurses come with many different backgrounds and abbreviations. Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA). CNAs often work in home care and long-term care settings and can be the main point of contact between a patient, their family, and the healthcare system. Sometimes called nursing assistants or nursing aides, they assist patients with daily activities and may administer medication, take vital signs, and keep health records. CNAs must pass a state licensing exam to provide patient care. Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN). LPNs often serve as the primary means of communication between the patient and your healthcare team. They monitor health and perform tasks like taking blood pressure, starting intravenous (IV) medications, changing bandages, and more. LPNs complete Practical Nursing Program coursework and must pass a state licensing exam. Registered Nurse (RN). When many people hear the word "nurse," they likely think of the wide range of responsibilities of an RN, such as administering medication and collaborating with physicians and APPs to coordinate patient care. Some RNs supervise LPNS and CNAs, and others specialize in certain areas of care. RNs hold either an associate's or bachelor's degree and must pass a state licensing exam. RNs can take additional training (such as a master's degree) to become an Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN). Nurse practitioners, nurse anesthetists, certified nurse midwives, and clinical nurse specialists are all examples of APRNs. The benefits of a diverse care team. When team members with diverse skills work together, patients get better care. Team members come together to form a complete patient care plan, giving patients the best care each step of the way. For example, a PA or an NP with expertise in orthopedics might initially evaluate a knee injury. They can spend time with you, learning about your history and developing a plan to care for your injury. If surgery is required, they can work with a surgeon and radiology expert to review your X-rays or MRIs and prepare for a procedure. Improving your access to high-quality care is our priority; that's why you will sometimes be treated by an APP instead of a physician. This process is more efficient for patients than waiting for an appointment with a physician—without sacrificing excellent care. Collaboration within care teams and between specialists allows us to provide consistently excellent care for our patients. That's our collective mission, no matter what letters come after a provider's name. Quick: when you hear the word doctor, what do you picture? Most would probably describe someone in a white lab coat with a stethoscope hanging around their neck or someone in medical scrubs—someone you would seek out if you have a deep cut that needed stitches. That word doctor, however, is a title assigned to many who don't come close to that description, many of whom you wouldn't want stitching up that cut. Take your English professor, for instance. No offense, Dr. Barrett. 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Skip to main content Here you can find out what some of the most common medical abbreviations mean. This may be useful if you want to understand your health records. An abbreviation is a short way of writing a longer word or phrase. Healthcare staff sometimes use the same abbreviations to mean different things.If you do not know what something in your health records means, ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist. If you cannot find the abbreviation you are looking forSpeak to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist for help with understanding your health records. Page last reviewed: 22 August 2022 Next review due: 22 August 2025 Created by YourDictionary via Getty Images Owned by YourDictionary, copyright YourDictionary Abbreviating the word doctor as "Dr." makes sense, since doctor begins with a "d" and ends with an "r." But where does the "MD" come from , and how is that different from "D.O" (or "Ph.d")? In this article The main abbreviations seen after a doctor's name are DO and MD. So, what do they mean? A DO is a doctor of osteopathy medicine. Osteopathy is "a system of manual therapeutic techniques aimed at restoring physical function and promoting the body's ability to heal itself, performed by a practitioner who is not a licensed physician." DOs practice alternative medicine and may not be licensed physicians. An MD is a doctor of medicine. MDs are general doctors that are licensed, like primary physician. They can use medical tools and practices to treat patients. MDs practice allopathic medicine. The abbreviations and acronyms that come after a doctor's name can indicate the type of schooling or training they received or any professional qualifications they hold. Some examples include: AuD - Doctor of Audiology DC - Doctor of Chiropractic DDS - Doctor of Dental Science (or Doctor of Dental Surgery) DMD - Doctor of Dental Medicine (or Doctor of Medical Dentistry) DO or OD - Doctor of Osteopathy Medicine (or Doctor of Optometry) DPM - Doctor of Podiatric Medicine DPT - Doctor of Physical Therapy Dr - Doctor DScPT - Doctor of Science in Physical Therapy DSN - Doctor of Science in Nursing DVM - Doctor of Veterinary Medicine ENT - Ear, nose and throat specialist GP - General Practitioner GYN - Gynecologist LSA - Licensed Surgical Assistant MD - Doctor of Medicine MLA - Medical Laboratory Assistant MP - Medical Psychologist MS - Master of Surgery OB/GYN - Obstetrician and Gynecologist PA - Physician's Assistant PharmD - Doctor of Pharmacy In addition to degrees and other certifications that doctors may receive, they might also belong to certain professional or medical associations in order to do their job. A doctor with a fellowship means they are dedicated to furthering their education, research or overall contribution to medicine. Examples include: FAAEM - Fellow of the American Academy of Emergency Medicine FAAFP - Fellow of the American Academy of Family Physicians FACC - Fellow of the American College of Cardiology FACE - Fellow of the American College of Endocrinology FACP - Fellow of the American College of Physicians FACS - Fellow of the American College of Surgeons FAHA - Fellow of the American Heart Association FAPA - Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association FFR - Fellow Faculty of Radiologists FRCPSC - Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada MRCOG - Member Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists MRCS - Member Royal College of Surgeons While most people tend to associate doctors with the medical community, there are many other types of doctors and degrees that aren't necessarily related to medicine at all. For example: DC - Doctor of Chiropractic DD - Doctor of Divinity DDiv - Doctor of Divinity DEd or EdD - Doctor of Education DMin - Doctor of Ministry DPA - Doctor of Public Administration DPH - Doctor of Public Health DPhil or PhD - Doctor of Philosophy DSW - Doctor of Social Work EdD - Doctor of Education JD - Doctor of Jurisprudence PhD - Doctor of Philosophy PsyD - Doctor of Psychology ScD - Doctor of Science SScD - Doctor of Social Science ThD - Doctor of Theology It's worth noting that while the abbreviations listed here do not have periods after each letter or set of letters, doing so can be perfectly acceptable under certain circumstances. For instance, there isn't a real difference between writing MD or M.D. when referring to a doctor of medicine. However, it wouldn't make sense to write G.Y.N. for a gynecologist abbreviation. Quick: when you hear the word doctor, what do you picture? Most would probably describe someone in a white lab coat with a stethoscope hanging around their neck or someone in medical scrubs—someone you would seek out if you have a deep cut that needed stitches. That word doctor, however, is a title assigned to many who don't come close to that description, many of whom you wouldn't want stitching up that cut. Take your English professor, for instance. No offense, Dr. Barrett. It can all be a bit confusing, which is why it's important to know who and why someone might be called a doctor, as well as what all those initials and abbreviations after their name mean. Here we break it all down. What does Dr. mean? Let's start with doctor or Dr. for short. While the first definition of the word is "a person licensed to practice medicine," that doesn't mean you want to take medical advice from anyone who calls themselves a doctor. There are many looser definitions of the word that follow and, frankly, make things a bit confusing. For example, the third definition is older slang for a "cook, as at a camp or on a ship," while the seventh entry is "an eminent scholar and teacher." Bugs Bunny didn't help matters either by plying anyone and everyone with his famous greeting,"What's up, doc?" The term doctor can be traced back to the late 1200s, and it stems from a Latin word meaning "to teach." It wasn't used to describe a licensed medical practitioner until about 1400, and it wasn't used as such with regularity until the late 1600s. It replaced the former word used for medical doctors—leech, which is now considered archaic. Physician vs. doctor: are these synonyms? While the term physician is a synonym for doctor, it's typically used to refer to those who practice general medicine rather than those who perform surgery, aka surgeons. A quack, on the other hand, is defined as "a fraudulent or ignorant pretender to medical skill." What does M.D. mean? Moving on to initials that carry more weight than a nod from Bugs, let's look at M.D.s. M.D., which can be used with or without the periods (M.D. or MD) is the designation for a medical doctor. This is earned by attending medical school (typically a four-year program after completing at least one undergraduate degree, plus a residency program), and learning to diagnose patients' symptoms and offer treatment. The initials M and D stem from the Latin title Medicīnae Doctor. There are many different types of doctors, with different specialties, but if you have a physical ailment, visiting a doctor with the initials M.D. is a good place to start. Specialty doctors may add even more initials to their title, such as DCN (doctor of clinical nutrition), DDS (doctor of dental surgery), or countless others they acquire with additional training. To make things even more confusing, some may add abbreviations from medical associations they belong to, such as FAAEM (Fellow of the American Academy of Emergency Medicine). As for Ph.D., this stands for "doctor of philosophy." It stems from the Latin term Philosophiae Doctor. You can get a Ph.D. in any number of subjects, from anthropology to mythological studies. It's not an easy feat, however, as to earn one, you must do original research and write a dissertation. Ph.D. vs. M.D.: are these synonyms? There are two big differences between Ph.D.s and M.D.s. When it comes to medicine, M.D.s can prescribe medications, and Ph.D.s can't. And yes, it's possible to be both an M.D. and a Ph.D. In fact, some med schools offer programs in which you can achieve both simultaneously. You can also get a professional doctorate degree in a number of fields. For example, you might receive a doctorate of education, an Ed.D. So, in a nutshell, both M.D.s and Ph.Ds can be referred to as doctors. If you're looking for someone to treat what ails you physically, then you want at least an M.D. following their name. If you want to dig deep into a subject and get advice from someone who has done their own research and who likely knows the latest and greatest developments in a particular area, then you're probably looking for a Ph.D. And if someone has both, even better—depending on your needs, it may be just what the doctor ordered. Want more synonyms? Get Thesaurus.com's sizzling synonyms right in your inbox! Learning your ABCs was as easy as 1-2-3, but when it comes to understanding medical titles, you may be met with an alphabet soup. That's because these days your care may be led by a variety of health care providers or clinical care teams who have different letters behind their names. You probably know that an MD is a medical doctor. But a DO, doctor of osteopathic medicine, is also a medical doctor who undergoes similar rigorous education and training. Then you add in other members of a medical team, such as a PA, NP, MA and more, and it can get a bit confusing. With that in mind, here's a breakdown of some of the medical professionals who might treat you in hospitals, clinics and doctors' offices. This will help you make sense of "the soup" and know who's who and who does what. The who's who of medical care MDs and DOs Most primary care teams are led by an MD (medical doctor) or a DO (doctor of osteopathic medicine). A medical doctor with an MD designation attends an allopathic medical school (traditional) accredited by the Liaison Committee on Medical Education. A DO is granted to physicians who graduate from an osteopathic medical school accredited by the Commission on Osteopathic College Accreditation. What do a MD and DO have in common? Both MDs and DOs undergo the most extensive training of any health care professional. They both complete lengthy education—typically including a four-year undergraduate degree, four years of medical school or college of osteopathic medicine and three to seven years of residency training after receiving their medical degrees. Some will go on to do fellowships to learn more about a specialty, such as interventional cardiology or internal medicine. They both must obtain medical licenses in the states where they practice and participate in ongoing medical education. Many also seek board certifications in certain specialties and complete recertifications as required. When it comes to patient care, an MD and DO both can: Diagnose and treat acute and chronic illnesses Order, perform and interpret diagnostic tests Refer patients to other health care specialists Prescribe medication and other treatments How does a DO differ from a MD? While both have the same amount of education and can diagnose and treat patients, they differ in their approach to medicine. An MD focuses on the diagnosis and treatment of human diseases, observing symptoms and treating them directly. They tend to take a more targeted approach to treatment. A DO takes a more holistic approach, or a whole-body approach, to diagnosis and treatment, considering the entire body system, nutrition and everyday environment. A DO must also take additional hours of training in the skill of osteopathic manipulative medicine (OMT). DOs learn how the bones, nerves and muscles work together and influence health. Using OMT, a DO can treat muscles and joints to relieve pain, promote healing and increase mobility. NP – Nurse Practitioner A NP, one of four advanced practice nursing specialties, is a registered nurse who has completed a Master of Science or doctoral degree (DNP) and advanced clinical training. They must then receive national certification in one of several specialties, such as acute care, pediatrics or women's health. NPs follow the nursing model that focuses heavily on the impact of the diagnosis and treatment on the patient. An NP can help diagnose and treat patients with routine and complex medical conditions, prescribe medications, educate patients about healthy lifestyle choices and serve as a patient's main health care provider. In some states, however, NPs work under the supervision of a physician to prescribe medication. PA – Physician Assistant A PA is a nationally certified, state licensed provider who is trained to work as part of a team with physicians. Most PAs complete a four-year college program and another two to three years of postgraduate education. PAs follow the medical model, which places greater emphasis on disease, anatomy and the physiology of the human body. They have extensive medical training to diagnose illness, develop and manage treatment plans, prescribe medications, perform procedures and serve as a patient's primary health care provider. PAs often collaborate with physicians. The value of PAs and NPs in primary care practices PAs and NPs are often able to see patients for routine exams and illnesses sooner than physicians, which allows patients to access care sooner. However, they always consult with the caring physician regarding patient care, including the treatment plan and any concerns that may require follow-up. They can consult with the physician immediately if there is a question or bring the physician in to see the patient, if necessary. What do other initials in health care mean? Here's a rundown of a few other initials who you might find caring for you. DPM (doctor of podiatric medicine): A DPM, also known as a podiatrist, can be both a surgeon and a physician at the same time and specializes in the foot, ankle and structure of the leg. They are the most qualified when it comes to treating lower extremity disorders, diseases and injuries. Oddly enough, they are neither an MD nor a DO, but podiatrists do undergo rigorous training. They complete four years of podiatric medical school and at least two years of postgraduate residency training. RN (registered nurse): An RN is a medical professional with a four-year nursing degree who has passed a licensing exam. RNs can provide direct patient care in inpatient and outpatient settings and are often in charge of monitoring patients, taking vital signs, administering medications and documenting patient history. They may also specialize in areas such as anesthesia and become a certified nurse anesthetist (CRNA). LPN (licensed practical nurse) and LVN (licensed vocational nurse): An LPN and LVN will have about a year of nursing education and will perform less technical skills, like taking vitals and observing patients. You'll typically find them in nursing homes and extended care facilities, hospitals and physician offices. They work under the direction of an RN or physician. CNA (certified nursing assistant): A CNA, also called a nurse's aide or patient care assistant, works directly with patients and medical staff, helping with many physical and complex tasks to ensure patients are well-cared for and safe. Most CNA certification programs take between four to 16 weeks to complete. You'll typically find them in nursing home and long-term care facilities, rehabilitation centers, adult day care centers and hospitals. CMA (certified medical assistant): CMAs work under a supervising health care provider and are cross trained to perform both clinical duties as well as administrative ones, such as arranging hospital admissions or lab work and handling bookkeeping and billing. Most CMAs work in physician offices, hospitals, outpatient clinics and other health care facilities. Takeaway The initials floating behind your health care provider's name can be confusing, but hopefully now you have a better understanding of who they are and what they do. There are many other roles within the health care environment (i.e., PharmD or PsyD) not mentioned here that also play an important role in your overall care. It's important to feel confident in the care you're receiving, so if you ever have questions about your provider's qualifications or background, don't be afraid to ask for understanding. Related articles: Quick: when you hear the word doctor, what do you picture? Most would probably describe someone in a white lab coat with a stethoscope hanging around their neck or someone in medical scrubs—someone you would seek out if you have a deep cut that needed stitches. That word doctor, however, is a title assigned to many who don't come close to that description, many of whom you wouldn't want stitching up that cut. Take your English professor, for instance. No offense, Dr. Barrett. 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