

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)/ Common Questions about Women's Health

Here are answers to some common questions you may have about the obstetrics and gynecology (OB-GYN) department.

What is "OB-GYN?" OB-GYN stands for "Obstetrics and Gynecology." Physicians that specialize in this area of medicine are often called "OB-GYNs." They are physician-surgeons who have a detailed understanding of the female reproductive system. They specialize in the health of the female reproductive system and in preventing, diagnosing, and treating its diseases.

OB-GYNs also care for women throughout their pregnancies and childbirth. Some OB-GYNs focus on obstetrics (pregnancy and childbirth) while others may focus more on gynecology (overall reproductive health). OB-GYNs may also complete specialized training in:

- Perinatology or maternal fetal medicine (the care of high-risk pregnancies)
- Gynecologic oncology (the care of female cancers)
- Urogynecology (the care of women with urinary problems)
- Reproductive endocrinology and infertility (the care of hormonal and fertility problems).

How much training does an OB-GYN physician have? In addition to graduating from medical school, our OB-GYN physicians have completed a 4-year residency training program in obstetrics and gynecology. If they decide to pursue further specialty training, then they complete an additional 2 to 4 year fellowship.

After training is completed, an OB-GYN takes both a written and oral exam in order to become "Board Certified." This distinguishes the physician as a true specialist in his or her field. Continued certification is achieved through periodic exams and specialized classes throughout the physician's career. All of our OB-GYNs are board certified or are in the process of achieving this designation as a women's health specialist.

What is a perinatologist? A perinatologist is an OB-GYN physician who specializes in the treatment of women with high-risk pregnancies, like insulin-controlled diabetes, pre-eclampsia, or preterm labor. The perinatologist supports our Obstetrical Team and can provide additional expertise and experience in difficult cases.

What is a Nurse Practitioner? Nurse practitioners (NPs) are registered nurses with a Master's degree and certification in a particular specialty. They are either OB-GYN nurse practitioners or family nurse practitioners who specialize in OB-GYN and are qualified to provide many of the services traditionally provided by the physician. You can be confident in our quality of care. Nurse practitioners work collaboratively with physicians and when indicated are supervised by OB-GYN physicians.

Nurse practitioners can provide a variety of health services, including preventative care exams, treatment when ill, referrals to health education or specialty areas. Nurse Practitioners can also diagnose and treat acute and chronic conditions, order blood tests and imaging studies, interpret test results and prescribe medications. Most importantly, nurse practitioners will work closely with you to help you meet your individual health goals.

What is a Certified Nurse Midwife? A Certified Nurse Midwife (CNM) is a registered nurse with an average of 2 years of additional Midwifery training; the specialty of normal pregnancy and birth. Midwifery education includes training in obstetrics, gynecology, and women's health care. Nurse Midwives are certified by the American College of Nurse Midwives, and licensed by the State of California. At Kaiser Permanente Santa Rosa, Nurse Midwives attend many of the normal deliveries, and assist with most Cesarean births. CNMs also provide prenatal and postpartum care, and provide lactation consultation for breastfeeding concerns.

What are my choices for prenatal care providers? At Kaiser Permanente Santa Rosa, a pregnant woman may see an OB-GYN Physician (MD), a Certified Nurse Midwife (CNM), or a Nurse Practitioner (NP) for her prenatal care. Prenatal visits with a CNM should be made well in advance, as Nurse Midwives have limited office hours.

Important - Visits with CNMs need to be scheduled at the clinic, rather than on-line or by phone.

Who will deliver my baby? In labor and delivery, the Nurse Midwives and Obstetricians work closely together. Nurse Midwives admit most women in labor to the hospital, and deliver many women who have normal births. CNMs also manage common conditions, co-manage many complications, and assist with Cesarean deliveries. Women with certain complications may require care by an Obstetrician.

Should I see a Lactation Consultant? Our goal is to support each woman in successfully breastfeeding. All of our Nurse Midwives are trained as lactation (breastfeeding) educators, and several are certified Lactation Consultants. CNMs provide lactation advice during pregnancy to women with a history of breastfeeding problems, breast surgery, or who have other breastfeeding concerns. If your primary provider is an MD or NP, they may refer you to see a CNM for lactation advice. Other Lactation Consultants provide breastfeeding support in the postpartum unit and in the pediatric clinic.

Where might I meet a Nurse Midwife? Some women see CNMs during pregnancy for prenatal care or lactation support. Almost all women will meet CNMs in labor and delivery, where Nurse Midwives and Obstetricians work closely together to provide care 24 hours a day. CNMs attend many of the normal births, and visit women who have had vaginal deliveries daily during their hospital stay.

How do I choose an OB-GYN provider? You can browse through the professional and personal profiles of OB-GYN physicians or Nurse Practitioners (NPs) or Certified Nurse Midwives (CNM) on this Web site. Our ***Choose your Doctor*** page will allow you to find Physicians or NPs or CNMs or specialists in your area. Talk to your friends or to other medical professionals you see at Kaiser Permanente; they may recommend an OB-GYN Physician or NP or CNM. Also, our New Member Experience can assist in matching you with an OB-GYN provider who might best suit your needs. Contact the New Member Experience team at 393-3186.

How often should I come in for a visit? Discuss this with your personal OB-GYN physician or NP or CNM. Generally, we encourage women to come in for a well-woman check-up every 1 to 2 years, but this can vary:

- If you're under 25 and sexually active, you should be tested for sexually transmitted diseases every year. This can be done during a check-up with your OB-GYN doctor or with a general medicine doctor or NP or CNM
- Pap tests for cervical cancer screening should begin at age 21. If your Pap results are normal, you can wait as long as 3 years between tests.
- If you are 40 or over, and you have no personal or family history of breast cancer, you should come in for a clinical breast exam and a mammogram every 1 to 2 years.
- If you have risk factors for breast cancer, you should talk to your OB-GYN physician or NP about when to begin regular screening.

When do I start getting mammograms? If you have no history of breast cancer in your family, you should begin getting mammograms every 1 to 2 years at age 40. Starting at age 50, you should get one every year, until you are 74 years old. Talk to us if you have a history of breast cancer; we can decide when to begin your screening based on your family history.

When should I have a bone mineral density (BMD) test? You should have your first bone mineral density (BMD) test starting at age 65 - or earlier if you're older than 45 and you've had a significant bone fracture or a spine fracture of any kind. You may also need a BMD test if you:

- Have a first degree relative with hip fracture
- Smoke
- Weigh less than 127 pounds
- Use steroids
- Have significant hyperthyroidism or hyperparathyroidism

How often should I get a Pap test? A Pap test is the most common type of screening test for cervical cancer. Pap tests should begin by age 21. We can discuss the screening interval that is best for you, but most women can safely wait three years between Pap tests because the incidence of cervical cancer is very rare in women. Also, cervical cancer develops very slowly, usually over the course of 10 years or more. So, a Pap and HPV test every 3 years can detect changes in cells early on and allow treatment and management.

You can stop having Pap and HPV tests if you are over 65 and have had either three or more normal Pap tests in the past 10 years and/or you are HPV negative. You can also stop having Pap tests if you have had a total hysterectomy (where your cervix was also removed) and you have no history of cancer of the cervix, vulva, or vagina.

Will I always see the same doctor? Usually, yes! However, you may not see your own doctor if you want a certain day and/or time for your appointment and your provider is not in the office at that time. You may also see a different doctor if you need an urgent or same-day appointment.

Can I review my lab results online? Yes. Many of your lab test results will be available for viewing online. But due to privacy concerns and regulations, some may not be. These may include Paps, tests for cancer, HIV/AIDS and others.

How do I pick a pediatrician for my child? During your pregnancy, it's a good idea to investigate which pediatricians or pediatric nurse practitioners would be a good fit for your family. If you have older children who have a particular pediatrician, your new baby should be able to see the same one. Browse through the home pages of our different pediatric providers using this Web site. Also, ask your friends or other Kaiser Permanente employees who they would recommend.

After the birth of your baby, you will be assigned a medical record number for the baby and can choose your pediatric provider. If you do not have a specific preference for a particular provider, someone in the pediatric department can help you choose one.

Can I e-mail my Doctor or Nurse Practitioner or Nurse Midwife? Yes! Here's the link: www.kp.org You will be directed to the sign on page for your kp.org account or will be given the opportunity to activate your account (new users).

If you are already a user, you can also access your physician's home page by double clicking on the "Email my Doctor" link found on the left side column of the physician home page.