



WHAT IS A D.O.?

Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine

Approximately 65% of practicing osteopathic physicians specialize in primary care areas, such as pediatrics, family practice, obstetrics and gynecology, and internal medicine.

Many DOs fill a critical need for physicians by practicing in rural and other medically underserved communities.

If you're like most people, you've been going to a physician ever since you were born and perhaps were not aware whether you were seeing a DO (osteopathic physician) or an MD (allopathic physician). You may not even be aware that there are two types of complete physicians in the United States. The fact is that both DOs and MDs are fully qualified physicians licensed to prescribe medication and perform surgery.

DOs and MDs are alike in many ways:

- Applicants to both DO and MD medical colleges typically have four-year undergraduate degrees with an emphasis on scientific courses.
- Both DOs and MDs complete four years of basic medical education.
- After medical school, both DOs and MDs obtain graduate medical education through such programs as internships and residencies. This training typically lasts three to six years and prepares DOs and MDs to practice a specialty.
- Both DOs and MDs can choose to practice in any specialty area of medicine—such as pediatrics, family practice, psychiatry, surgery or obstetrics.
- DOs and MDs must pass comparable examinations to obtain state licenses.
- DOs and MDs both practice in fully accredited and licensed health care facilities.
- Together, DOs and MDs enhance the state of health care available in America.

DOs, however, belong to a separate yet equal branch of American medical care. It is the ways that DOs and MDs are different that can bring an extra dimension to your family's health care.



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DOs Bring Something Extra to Medicine

Today osteopathic physicians continue to be on the cutting edge of medicine. DOs are able to combine today's medical technology with their ears, to listen caringly to their patients; their eyes, to see their patients as whole persons; and their hands, to diagnose and treat injury and illness.

DOs bring something extra to medicine:

- Osteopathic medical schools emphasize training students to be primary care physicians.
- DOs practice a “whole person” approach to medicine. Instead of just treating specific symptoms or illnesses, they regard your body as an integrated whole.
- Osteopathic physicians focus on preventive health care.
- DOs receive extra training in the musculoskeletal system—your body's interconnected system of nerves, muscles and bones that make up two-thirds of your body mass. This training provides osteopathic physicians with a better understanding of the ways that an illness or injury in one part of your body can affect another.
- Osteopathic manipulative treatment (OMT) is incorporated into the training and practice of osteopathic physicians. With OMT, osteopathic physicians use their hands to diagnose illness and injury and to encourage your body's natural tendency toward good health. By combining all other available medical options with OMT, DOs offer their patients the most comprehensive care available in medicine today.

Information courtesy of the American Osteopathic Association

More Than a Century of Unique Care

Osteopathic medicine is a unique form of American medical care that was started in 1874 by Andrew Taylor Still, MD, DO. Dr. Still was dissatisfied with the effectiveness of 19th century medicine. He believed that many of the medications of his day were useless or even harmful. Dr. Still was one of the first in his time to study the attributes of good health so that he could better understand the process of disease.

In response, Dr. Still developed a philosophy of medicine based on ideas that date back to Hippocrates, the father of medicine. That philosophy focuses on the unity of all body parts. Dr. Still identified the musculoskeletal system as a key element of health. He recognized the body's ability to heal itself and stressed preventive medicine, eating properly and keeping fit.

In today's terms, DOs evaluate each patient's personal health risks—such as smoking, high blood pressure, excessive cholesterol levels, stress and other lifestyle factors. In coordination with prescribing appropriate medical treatment, osteopathic physicians act as teachers to help patients take more responsibility for their well-being and to change unhealthy patterns.

