



Care Partner Information

Tips for Providing Older Adult Care

Urgent Care Centers

Urgent care centers are medical care centers that can take care of most minor health needs. But urgent care centers cannot treat serious medical emergencies. Anyone with a serious medical emergency should go to the nearest hospital emergency room, or call 911.

Urgent care centers are good for treating one-time health needs. Patients who have many health problems should not use an urgent care center for normal doctor visits. These patients should have a primary care doctor that knows them well and can help manage their health.

Below is a list of the types of care urgent care centers can provide, and what they cannot provide.

Urgent care can:	Urgent care <u>cannot</u> :
Treat mild sickness, such as a cold or flu	Treat serious health emergencies, such as a heart attack
Treat minor injuries, such as a sprained ankle	Treat chronic illnesses like diabetes or high blood pressure
Give immunizations such as flu shots	Refill prescription medications
Take x-rays, blood tests or urine tests	Treat pain that needs prescription medications.
Do sports or work physicals	Replace the need for a primary care doctor

Using urgent care for minor health needs has several benefits:

- Patients can “walk-in” and see a doctor without an appointment. Most have fairly short wait times.
- Many urgent care centers open early and stay open late. Check the hours of the urgent care center before visiting.
- Urgent care costs less than emergency rooms.
- Urgent care centers accept some types of health insurance. Always ask if they accept the person’s health insurance before visiting.

This Care Partner Information page is part of a series on older adult caregiving tips. They are written to help family and community caregivers, direct care workers and community health representatives care for older adults. Available in English and Spanish at www.aging.arizona.edu

Urgent Care Centers should not be used for emotional and psychological help

Urgent care centers and emergency departments treat physical health issues. If the person needs mental or emotional help, call a local crisis line. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) can provide information about local resources at www.nami.org or 1-800-950-NAMI. If the person talks about suicide or there are other safety concerns, call 911.

How to find local urgent care centers

The best time to find an urgent care center is **before** it is needed. Ask for recommendations from doctors, neighbors, friends or co-workers. In smaller cities, there may only be one or two choices. In large cities, it is a good idea to look in the phone book or online to find urgent care centers that are nearby. After locating nearby urgent care centers, call or visit their websites to find out more information. The chart below provides some questions to ask of urgent care centers to find the best fit.

Questions to ask before choosing an urgent care center
How close is the urgent care center?
When are they open?
What types of care can they provide? What can't provide?
How long is the average wait time?
When are the busy times of day?
Will they take the person's health insurance?
What paperwork should the person bring to a visit? Can any paperwork be filled out before the visit?

After Going to Urgent Care

Make sure to understand any medical instructions before leaving the urgent care center. If the doctor prescribed any medications, ask if they can be filled at the urgent care center, or need to be picked up at a pharmacy. Always tell the person's primary care doctor about any visits to urgent care. Be sure to tell the primary care doctor about any new medications or treatments prescribed by the urgent care doctor.

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