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Choosing a gyno: Do I want a man or woman? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I am young, and I'm switching gynecologists, but I am worried about having a male one. I had a female before and I wasn't as uncomfortable about going. Is there any reason I should be worried?

Answer

Dear Reader,

You say you were not "as uncomfortable" about visiting a female gynecologist. Perhaps, regardless of the gender of your health care provider, you have some discomfort concerning your gynecological visits? Many women experience some level of unease when it comes to visiting a gynecologist, and that's okay.

Before you figure out whether you want your new gyno to be a man or a woman, think about how you feel. Specifically, what makes you uncomfortable about going to the gynecologist? Are you embarrassed? What about? Are you too nervous to speak openly about what might be worrying you? Perhaps you feel that your sexual and reproductive health behaviors are private. Maybe you're anxious about having a health care provider examine your breasts, vulva, and vagina. Addressing concerns by letting your provider know that you are feeling nervous will help her/him respond most effectively to your needs. Regular check-ups are an important part of maintaining your sexual and reproductive health, and everyone involved benefits from open, honest dialogue.

As for the gender, some women prefer a gynecologist who is a female, because they expect that a woman will have a better understanding of what they're going through. Some prefer a man, since they feel more comfortable with a man. Fortunately, research has shown that both women and men health care providers give the same quality of medical care, and that the gender of the provider makes no difference when it comes to discussions about diagnosis, treatment, prognosis, or general medical information. For your annual visit, your provider will still do a Pap smear, pelvic and breast exams, regardless of her/his gender.

If the thought of speaking openly with a male gynecologist creates anxiety for you, then perhaps you want to stick with a female gynecologist. It's not clear what your age is, however, other

options you might want to consider include visiting an adolescent health clinic, or if you're a college student, your university's health service.

Know that you can schedule a consultation for your first visit, before you schedule an appointment for an actual exam. That will give you an opportunity to meet the gynecologist and assess your comfort with her/him. You might also consider asking a friend or family member to accompany you to your visit. In the end, if you feel comfortable and able to communicate well with your new gynecologist, you're in good hands, regardless of her/his gender.

Alice!

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