



Joe's Tips – Module 3: Right Plan, Right Doctor

- 1. If your employer offers a choice of medical plans, compare your options.** Each year during annual enrollment, carefully compare *all* your plan options so you can choose the coverage that's best for you. Plans often change from year to year, so *always* take a fresh look each enrollment period.
- 2. Do the math when comparing your options and take advantage of “modeling tools” offered by your employer.** When comparing options it comes down to this: are you willing to pay greater out-of-pocket costs if and when you need care, in exchange for lower monthly paycheck contributions? Think about the health care expenses you anticipate for the coming year and then do the math for each option. Which plan saves you the most money? Online modeling tools available through many employers make it easy by doing the math for you. (Go to Learn More for a comparison worksheet.)
- 3. The plan with the highest premium contribution isn't always the best. A higher-deductible plan might actually cost less each year.** Many people choose the highest-contribution plan, thinking it will save them money in the long-run. But if you are relatively healthy, a plan with a higher deductible could end up saving you hundreds of dollars each year. Sometimes higher-deductible plans are even a better bargain for heavier users of health care, particularly if combined with an FSA, HRA or HSA. (See next tip.)
- 4. Take advantage of tax-free health care accounts that can be used in tandem with your plan.** If you are eligible to participate in a flexible spending accounts (FSA), health reimbursement accounts (HRAs) or health savings accounts (HSAs), take advantage of these tax-free accounts to keep more money in your wallet. (See the Learn More section for more on these accounts.)
- 5. If you choose a higher deductible plan, sock away some of the money you'll save in premium contributions... just in case.** No one can predict for certain whether a serious injury or illness will strike. So if you choose a higher-deductible plan, set aside the money you'll save in lower contributions as a “buffer” in case you have unexpected medical expenses. If you end up staying healthy, you'll have that much more set aside in savings! Consider a Health Savings Account (if your high deductible plan qualifies), which lets you set aside *tax-free* money for health care, and even roll it over from year to year.
- 6. If you're eligible for coverage through your spouse's employer, compare that coverage to what is available to you.** In some cases, it may make sense to waive your company's coverage and enroll in your spouse's plan. Keep in mind not all employers allow spouses who work elsewhere to participate in their plans. Also find out whether your employer will allow you to rejoin your plan during a later enrollment

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period.

7. **Keep track of your annual medical costs to help you estimate future costs more accurately.** This information will be helpful in “doing the math” when comparing your options during annual enrollment.

8. **Establish a relationship with a primary care physician (PCP).** It’s essential to your long-term well-being to have a PCP who knows your medical history and can work closely with you to maintain your health. Your PCP can help guide you when a health problem arises or when you need specialty care. Select a PCP for each member of your family and keep him or her up-to-date on any care or medications you receive from other providers. Choose your PCP when you’re healthy, so you’ll have someone to call when you are sick. (It drives up health care costs when people go to the emergency room when a health problem arises – the most expensive place to be treated – because they don’t have a family doctor to call.)

9. **Be honest! Your health (and life) could depend on it.** Don’t let pride or embarrassment keep you from being truthful with your doctor about your drinking, eating or smoking habits. Your doctor *must* know these things in order to treat you appropriately. And be sure to tell your doctor about any drugs (prescription or otherwise) or supplements you’re taking. If not, he or she might unknowingly prescribe something that interacts with what you’re taking. Drug interactions can be harmful or even fatal, so don’t hold back.

10. **Make sure your doctor is a good fit with your needs.** Choose a PCP (primary care physician) who knows and understands the health issues that are important to you. For example, if you are committed to losing weight through good nutrition, select a PCP who’s knowledgeable in this area.

11. **Many routine ailments can be treated effectively – and for less – by a nurse practitioner or physicians’ assistant.** In fact, many health systems now operate walk-in medical clinics and “Quick Care Clinics” where you can receive fast, inexpensive treatment for common problems such as sore throats, bladder infections, conjunctivitis (pink eye), and more. If you use such services, tell your primary care physician on your next visit, so it can be documented in your medical record.