

What is a Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (D.O.)

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 D.O. (osteopathic physician) or an M.D. (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 D.O.s and M.D.s are fully qualified physicians licensed to prescribe medication and perform surgery. Is there any difference between these two kinds of physicians? Yes. And no.

D.O.s and M.D.s are alike in many ways:

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

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

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, M.D., D.O. 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.

Dr. Still pioneered the concept of "wellness" more than 130 years ago. In today's terms, D.O.s 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.

21st Century, Frontier Medicine

Just as Dr. Still pioneered osteopathic medicine in 1874, today's osteopathic physicians serve as modern-day medical pioneers.

They continue the tradition of bringing health care to areas of greatest need:

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

- Many D.O.s fill a critical need for physicians by practicing in rural and other medically underserved communities.

Today osteopathic physicians continue to be on the cutting edge of medicine. D.O.s 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.

D.O.s bring something extra to medicine:

- Osteopathic medical schools emphasize training students to be primary care physicians.
- D.O.s 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.
- D.O.s 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, D.O.s offer their patients the most comprehensive care available in medicine today.

If you are not seeing a D.O. and would like help finding one, you can [search our database](#) to find one in your area, or call (866) FIND-A-DO.

[What is a D.O.? \(Brochure\)](#)

What Is OMT?

Osteopathic manipulative treatment, or OMT, is hands-on care. It involves using the hands to diagnose, treat, and prevent illness or injury. Using OMT, your osteopathic physician (D.O.) will move your muscles and joints using techniques including stretching, gentle pressure and resistance.

Who Can Benefit From OMT?

OMT can help people of all ages and backgrounds. It can:

- ease pain
- promote healing
- increase mobility

OMT is often used to treat muscle pain. But it can also help patients with a number of other health problems such as:

- asthma
- sinus disorder
- carpal tunnel syndrome
- migraines
- menstrual pain

When appropriate, OMT can complement—and even replace—drugs or surgery. In this way, OMT brings an important dimension to standard medical care.