

# What is a D.O.?



If you're like most people, you've been going to physicians ever since you were born and perhaps were not aware whether some or all of them were osteopathic physicians, also known as DOs. You may not even be aware that there are two types of complete physicians in the United States—DOs and MDs.

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**

- Students entering both DO and MD medical colleges typically have already completed four- year bachelor's degrees with an emphasis on scientific courses.
- Both DOs and MDs complete four years of medical education.
- After medical school, both DOs and MDs obtain graduate medical education through internships, residencies, and fellowships. This training lasts three to eight years and prepares DOs and MDs to practice a specialty.
- Both DOs and MDs can choose to practice in any specialty of medicine—such as pediatrics, family medicine, psychiatry, surgery, or ophthalmology.
- DOs and MDs must pass comparable examinations to obtain state licenses.
- DOs and MDs both practice in accredited and licensed health care facilities.
- Together, DOs and MDs enhance the state of health care available in the U.S.
- 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 health care.

## The Osteopathic Approach

For more than a century, osteopathic physicians have built a tradition of bringing health care to where it is needed most:

- Approximately 60% of practicing osteopathic physicians practice in the primary care specialties of family medicine, general internal medicine, pediatrics, and obstetrics and gynecology.
- Many DOs fill a critical need for physicians by practicing in rural and other medically underserved communities.
- In addition, these modern-day pioneers practice on the cutting edge of medicine. DOs combine today's medical technology with their ears to listen caringly to their patients, with their eyes to see their patients as whole persons, and with their hands to diagnose and treat patients for injury and illness.

### About Osteopathic Medicine

You are more than just the sum of your body parts. That's why doctors of osteopathic medicine (DOs) practice a "whole person" approach to health care. Instead of just treating specific symptoms, osteopathic physicians concentrate on treating you as a whole.

Osteopathic physicians understand how all the body's systems are interconnected and how each one affects the others. They focus special attention on the musculoskeletal system, which reflects and influences the condition of all other body systems.

This system of bones and muscles makes up about two-thirds of the body's mass, and a routine part of the examination DOs give patients is a careful evaluation of these important structures. DOs know that the body's structure plays a critical role in its ability to function. They can use their eyes and hands to identify structural problems and to support the body's natural tendency toward health and self-healing.

Osteopathic physicians also use their ears to listen to you and your health concerns. DOs help patients develop attitudes and lifestyles that don't just fight illness but also help prevent disease. Millions of Americans prefer this concerned and compassionate care and have made DOs their physicians for life.