

**Health for the Whole Family**  
**February 2009**

**IS YOUR DOCTOR AN M.D. OR A D.O.?**

The next time you visit a hospital or doctor's office, try to spot the physicians' credentials. Are they M.D.s or D.O.s (osteopathic physicians)? While there are similarities between the two types of doctors, there are also differences.

Many people have been going to a doctor since they were born, but are unaware that there are two types of physicians able to prescribe medicine and perform surgery. Both D.O.s and M.D.s complete an undergraduate Bachelor's degree followed by four years of medical education. D.O.s receive their medical degrees from one of 25 osteopathic medical schools at 28 locations throughout the United States. Osteopathic medical schools emphasize training students to be primary care physicians first. Consequently, upon graduation osteopathic physicians serve a year-long rotating internship in the primary care areas. After the completion of this internship, they may choose to specialize in any area of medicine, requiring an additional two to six years of residency training. Many D.O.'s even advance their training with a subspecialty fellowship in such highly specialized fields as allergy, geriatrics, spine and trauma surgery, and facial plastic surgery, just to name a few.

D.O.s also receive additional training in the musculoskeletal system—the body's interconnected system of nerves, muscles and bones that make up two-thirds of its mass. This training provides osteopathic physicians with a better understanding of the ways that an injury or illness in one part of the body can affect another. This education also promotes the "whole person" approach to medicine that osteopathic physicians practice.

As an osteopathic physician, they regard the body as an integrated whole, not a sum of parts. This "whole person" philosophy will often lead an osteopathic physician to investigate the patient's lifestyle to distinguish if any outside elements are contributing to an ailment.

When a patient is examined, the osteopathic physician may spend several minutes speaking with him or her about their work or home environment before they even begin the physical examination.

These are things that are often overlooked by the patient but usually play a significant role in their general health.

D.O.s use an additional treatment tool called Osteopathic Manipulative Treatment (OMT). With OMT, D.O.s use their hands to help diagnose and treat injury and illness and to encourage the body's natural tendency toward good health.

While many people consider OMT a tool for back pain, it can be used to help treat many ailments. From migraines to ear pain, to prenatal care, or even simply examining a patient for general health—OMT has many helpful effects.

Today there are more than 64,000 D.O.s nationwide who 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 as well as illness. For more information about D.O.s and osteopathic medicine or to find a D.O. in your area, visit [www.osteopathic.org](http://www.osteopathic.org).

**\*The contributing physician to this article was Brett M. Scotch, DO, an osteopathic otolaryng and facial plastic surgeon from Wesley Chapel, Fl.**

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