

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

If you're like most people, you've been going to a doctor 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 perform surgery and prescribe medication in all 50 states. Is there any difference between these two kinds of doctors? Yes. And no

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

- Applicants to both D.O. and M.D. medical schools typically have a four-year undergraduate degree with an emphasis on scientific courses.
- Both D.O.s and M.D.s complete four years of medical school
- After medical school, both D.O.s and M.D.s can choose to practice in a specialty area of medicine -- such as internal medicine, pediatrics, surgery, obstetrics. This requires completing a residency program which is an additional two to six years of training.
- Both D.O.s and M.D.s must pass comparable national licensing examinations and can be licensed to practice medicine or surgery in any of the 50 States
- D.O.s and M.D.s both practice in fully accredited and licensed health care facilities.
- D.O.s comprise a separate, yet equal branch of American medical care. Together, D.O.s and M.D.s enhance the state of care available in America.

## D.O.s bring something extra to medicine:

- Osteopathic medical schools emphasize training students to be primary care physicians (internal medicine, pediatricians, obstetricians/gynecologists).
- D.O.s practice a "whole person" approach to medicine. Instead of just treating specific

symptoms or illnesses, they assess the overall health of their patients including home and work environments.

- 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 its body mass. This training provides osteopathic physicians with a better understanding of the ways that an injury or illness in one part of your body can affect another



## More than a Century of Unique Care

Osteopathic medicine is a unique form of American medical care that was developed in 1874 by Dr. Andrew Taylor Still. 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 founded a philosophy of medicine based on ideas that date back to Hippocrates, the father of medicine. The philosophy focuses on the unity of all body parts. He 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 125 years ago. In today's terms, personal health risks -- such as smoking, high blood pressure, excessive cholesterol levels, stress and other lifestyle factors -- are evaluated for each individual. In coordination with appropriate medical treatment, the osteopathic physician acts as a teacher to help patients take more responsibility for their own well-being and change unhealthy patterns