



## URGENT CARE: When is it right for me?

by Barbara Stahura

In my neighborhood, it is impossible to take a short walk without passing multiple signs proclaiming Urgent Care. These offices are part of a nationwide trend offering walk-in medical services as an alternative to an Emergency Department visit. Do you know when an Urgent Care Center may be the best, and less expensive choice for immediate medical attention - and when urgent care is not a wise choice?



An Urgent Care Center could be the right alternative to an Emergency Department if you need care such as stitches for a cut, x-rays to check for possible fracture after a fall, or IV fluid administration after a prolonged bout of vomiting. It is never the right choice for someone having a seizure or chest pain.

An Urgent Care Center staffed by a Board Certified Emergency Medicine Physician was the best choice for TTN member Susan Freeman when she cut her finger with a new, and very sharp, mandolin slicer. Her accident happened on NYC Marathon Sunday, and Susan knew Manhattan Emergency Departments would be swamped with injured marathoners.

She rushed to a new Urgent Care Center near her apartment. Within a few minutes of arrival Susan's sliced finger was cleaned and stitched together by the center's physician. She returned to the center the following week to have the same MD remove her eight stitches.

Susan was so pleased with the prompt and proficient care received for her finger- which healed without significant scarring- that she again used Urgent Care instead of an Emergency Department for an insect bite that became swollen and infected on a Sunday afternoon. Talk to your primary care physician at your next visit. Ask about the best choices when you require prompt medical care, but the office is closed.

Many PCPs, including my own, now refer patients to Internal Medicine groups in their healthcare system. They see walk-in patients late evening and weekend hours. Although my PCP does not work on weekends, if there is an urgent medical issue I can go to an affiliated group near my home on Saturday or Sunday.



These offices always communicate findings directly to the patient's primary physician. Generally, they participate in the same insurance plans, and often have the ability to document after-hours visits in a system-wide electronic medical record. If your PCP is not part of a healthcare system, ask if she/he has a covering physician group or a preferred Urgent Care Center staffed by Board Certified Internal Medicine Physicians.

*"I RECOMMEND THAT YOU VISIT A FEW CENTERS NEAR YOUR HOME ON A QUIET WEEKDAY, BEFORE YOU NEED THEIR SERVICES. CONFIRM IF THEY PARTICIPATE IN YOUR INSURANCE, THEIR HOSPITAL/HEALTH SYSTEM AFFILIATIONS, THE TESTS/PROCEDURES PERFORMED, AND THE TRAINING OF ON - SITE MEDICAL PROVIDERS."*

Every woman who has reached the age the age of 50 owes it to herself to develop a relationship with a primary care physician, preferably, one who is a member of a group practice affiliated with a large teaching hospital.

If you have chronic medical conditions or are undergoing treatment for an active medical problem, it is especially important to confirm with your physician exactly when it is safe to visit a Walk-in Medical Office/Urgent Care Center vs. when to call 911 for immediate transport to an Emergency Department. A reference to bring to that "what if" discussion with your physician is found here:

<http://www.mountsinai.org/patient-care/service-areas/urgent-care/what-is-urgent-car>