

# Ask the Doctor

**Question:** Dear Dr. Buttar. I read the article last month in the Whole Health News about the six ways to slow down aging. I enjoyed the article and noticed that you had M.D. and D.O. after your name. What is a D.O.?

**Answer:** First, let me correct a typographical error. I am not an M.D. I am a D.O.

The question you ask is a very good one actually, the difference between an M.D. and a D.O. today, is very little in practice, but, philosophically, quite substantial. In fact, some people have been going to the same doctor for years and never realized that their doctor was a D.O.

D.O. stands for Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine, not to be confused with O.D., which stands for an Optometrist. Only M.D.'s and D.O.'s can practice medicine, write prescription medication, perform surgery and specialize in any type of medical practice, from general practice to cardio-thoracic surgery. The only other type of doctor that can write prescription medication and do surgery is a D.P.M. or Doctor of Podiatric Medicine, more commonly known as a foot doctor, but they are limited to the surgery of the foot or ankle.

Both M.D.'s and D.O.'s go to college for four years typically, then onto medical school for another four years followed by an Internship and residency, which can be anywhere from two to five years. Finally, if applicable, onto a Fellowship, which designates them as a sub-specialist. Both M.D.'s and D.O.'s take the same or comparable examinations to become licensed depending on the state in which they live. Both are regulated by the same medical boards and have the same requirements to obtain their D.E.A.'s (Drug Enforcement Agency) numbers for controlled substances. The philosophical difference between an M.D. and a D.O. are not that obvious today, but interestingly, have transcended the difference between degrees.

The Osteopathic philosophy theoretically believes in treating the patient and not the disease as opposed to the Allopathic philosophy of treating the symptom of the disease. However, M.D.'s and D.O.'s do not have a monopoly



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on practice philosophies, of each other. Many of my Allopathic colleagues and friends (M.D.'s) choose to practice medicine with the Osteopathic philosophy of treating the patients and not the symptom of the disease. Conversely, many of my Osteopathic colleagues and friends (D.O.'s) choose to practice with the Allopathic philosophy of treating the symptoms of the disease.

The key is to carefully choose a doctor whose practice philosophy is similar and complements that of your own personal philosophy, regardless of the degree the physician holds. The philosophy should make sense to you, and the goals should be clear. It makes no difference as to which type of doctor you choose, as long as they are competent, aware of their limitations, and don't over extend their practice scope beyond their training. Remember however, that only M.D.'s and D.O.'s are medical doctors.

One warning, however, should be made. Be cautious of any type of doctor who has to associate himself with an M.D. or D.O. in order to provide any type of specific treatment or specialized care. And check your doctors credentials. Call the boards and ask if the doctor is credentialed in performing the type of treatment you are seeking.

You can call the A.M.A. or the A.O.A. and request information on appropriate boards. If you are interested in alternative medicine, you can call A.C.A.M (American College for Advancement in Medicine) at 1-800-532-3688 and get a listing of doctors in your area who are credentialed in specific types of treatments.