



This part is devoted to explaining about the medical systems in Japan. Topics include how to receive clinical examinations at medical institutions, about hospitalization, ambulance services and pharmacies, as well as public health insurance systems.

1 Medical institutions

When you are sick or injured, you receive treatment at medical institutions. The following explains the different types of medical institutions, rules, etc.

1-1 Basic knowledge about medical institutions

(1) Types of medical institutions

Medical institutions in Japan are divided into: hospitals, or large-scale medical institutions capable of hospitalizations and check-ups; and clinics individually run by doctors, individual offices and clinics where you can consult doctors on minor conditions on a daily basis.

Doctor's offices and clinics are medical institutions with hospitalization facilities of 19 beds or fewer. Many of them have no hospitalization facilities at all. They are suitable for minor conditions.

Large hospitals are equipped with hospitalization facilities and check-up tools. National and public hospitals maintain high level medical systems for each of their specialized medical departments. At hospitals with 200 beds or more, patients may be charged extra fees unless they visit with a referral by a doctor.

It is advised to visit a clinic (doctor's office) first and further receive specialized treatment at a large hospital upon necessity. It is ideal to check medical institutions in your neighborhood so that you can take adequate action once you need any medical attention.



Personal physician on a daily basis

minor conditions such as colds and stomachache



Doctor's offices, clinics

Large hospitals for possible major problems

serious sickness, conditions or injuries



Large hospitals (general hospitals)

Referrals

When any serious condition is discovered
When an operation or hospitalization is required

(2) Departments

Clinics and hospitals determine which department patients must go to depending on their sickness or injuries. General hospitals cover almost all departments, while some other hospitals and clinics cater to a limited number of departments or are specialized in certain departments. These institutions are chosen depending on specific conditions of sickness and injuries. Major departments include internal medicine, surgical medicine and pediatric. The larger hospitals are, the more sub-divided their departments are, with the aim of offering more specialized treatment. The following list shows some of the actual clinical departments and what can be handled at each of them.

Departments

Internal medicine	A department that treats conditions using medication. It covers colds and other sickness in general. If you have no idea what disease you are suffering from, you should visit this department first.
Surgical medicine	This department is for external injuries. It basically treats cases that require operations.
Pediatric	Dedicated to children up to elementary schoolers, for general sicknesses.
Orthopedics	It deals with problems of bones, joints and muscles such as fractures, sprains and back pains.
Ophthalmology (eye clinic)	It focuses on eye diseases in general, while performing sight tests as well.
Dentistry	It treats problems related to teeth, such as cavities.



Other departments include: otorhinolaryngology (ear, nose and throat); dermatology; obstetrics and gynecology; urology; psychiatry; neurosurgery (brain surgery).

When you visit a large hospital and do not know which department to go, enquire, explaining your condition, at the reception.

(3) First-come system and appointment system

The first-come system is employed at many clinics and hospitals in Japan. This could mean you have to wait for one to two hours before you see the doctor. However, the appointment system is common among dentists. Some other clinics and hospitals also require appointments. You are advised to confirm the system used by an institution before you visit it.