

How to use your GP surgery well

The healthcare provided by our National Health Service (NHS) is important to all of us. This page is about how to access a GP (or doctor's) surgery, to make sure you get the healthcare you need.

Did you know?

- We all support our NHS by paying taxes. This means health care is free of charge to everyone who is eligible
- Only use the service when you need it. [Pharmacies or chemists can help you too](#)
- GP surgeries will make sure you are seen as soon as possible after assessing your needs
- Some GP surgeries offer telephone consultations with a doctor. [You can use E consult on their website or register for a patient online service](#)
- It is very important that you do not miss appointments and that you let the GP know as soon as possible if you cannot attend
- You can see a pharmacist in private for common conditions and minor injuries; the pharmacist is an expert on medication to ease symptoms

GP Surgeries are working differently

To help meet everyone's health needs as quickly as possibly you can help by:

- **being patient with your GP surgery.** There may be a longer wait than normal for an appointment as they work to catch up and offer vaccinations
- **wearing a face mask** when attending appointments in a healthcare setting
- **answer the questions that the receptionist asks you.** This helps them to assess your needs. Your personal information is confidential. It is used to decide if you need a face to face appointment, have a phone or video consultation or if you need advice

from your local pharmacy.

- **attend an appointment with another health professional** such as an advanced nurse practitioner, who can diagnose and treat health conditions. This means you can see the right person for your needs quickly
 - **take part in a telephone or video consultation appointment.** It may be quicker and easier for you to have a telephone or video consultation with your GP
 - **attend a face to face appointment if you are offered one.** If you can no longer attend don't forget to cancel it as soon as possible.
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How to use your GP surgery in a way that works best for everyone

- Register with a GP surgery
 - GP surgeries are made up of receptionists, nurses, doctors (GPs) and other health professionals
 - You can see a nurse or doctor. Ask at reception about who is the best person to meet your need
 - Nurses and doctors are trained to a high standard. They're experts in diagnosing illness and supporting people to manage their conditions. If needed, they can make appointments for you to see a specialist
 - You will be asked for personal information when you register
 - All your personal information that you give to the doctor or nurse is confidential. Your health care won't be discussed with anyone, including your family, without your permission
 - The only time when a doctor or nurse is unable to keep your information private is in the unusual situation, for instance they may hear about a child or adult being in danger or at risk of serious harm
 - Tell reception if you need support to use the surgery. For example, wheelchair access or if you need an interpreter
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You must make an appointment to see a GP or other professional

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Book your appointment by phone, website, app or at reception

- You may have to wait for a non-urgent appointment. If you think you need to see someone urgently, tell reception. If it is urgent, you will be seen the same day. Home visits can be arranged if needed.
 - Make best use of your appointment by deciding on your main concern. Ask about the benefits and risks of treatment choices and what these mean to you, so you feel part of any decisions
 - Don't forget your support needs (e.g. wheelchair, interpreter)
 - You can ask for a double appointment if you feel that you need more time for discussion. Book in advance.
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If you are given a prescription (green paper with details of medicines)

- Take the prescription to a pharmacy (chemist)
 - Tell the pharmacist if you need support
 - The pharmacist will give you your medication and will be able to answer your questions
 - The pharmacist can explain about taking medication on time and side effects
 - The pharmacist will check if you need to pay for prescriptions or if you can get them free
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Your GP will 'refer you' to see a specialist if needed

You may need to go to a hospital to see a specialist. Sometimes you might have to wait for an appointment. People who need to be seen urgently are seen first.

Information about your appointment will be sent to you. If you find this information difficult to understand, go back to your GP surgery. It is very important not to miss an appointment.

What to do in an emergency

Always [dial 999](#) in a life threatening emergency.

If you need help with minor injuries at any time or urgent care when your GP practice or local pharmacy is closed [visit NHS 111](#) or [call NHS 111](#).

Other places to get help

[NHS.UK](#) website gives advice on common health problems. You can use their online symptom checker and find health services near you.

[NHS App](#) allows you to access your health information. This can be useful if you can't remember when you last saw a GP or had a consultation about your health or condition. Download the app to your mobile device and you can:

- book GP surgery appointments and add them to your calendar
- see your referrals to a hospital or specialist and manage the booking
- nominate a pharmacy
- order repeat prescriptions
- opted in or out of organ donation
- see your Covid 19 vaccination status with dates of the vaccine and the product

[Your Doctor or GP](#) article on Information NOW has more details on how to find a GP surgery close to you and how to register.

[Connected Voice Advocacy](#) can offer support to patients at GP appointments.

[NHS 111](#) is a free phone helpline which can help you find healthcare close to you.

[The Patients Association](#) is the national telephone and email helpline for anyone trying to navigate health and social care systems in the UK. The helpline service is free and confidential. They can help you to:

- access to treatments
- get a second opinion on your health condition or diagnosis
- make a complaint
- understand social care

- get your voice heard as a patient
 - change your GP or dentist
 - see your medical records
 - speak to other organisations to help you if needed
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Accessible Information Standard

If you have a sensory loss or disability you are entitled by law to accessible information about your healthcare and support from the NHS, as well as, other publicly funded social care services. For example this could include large print or a professional BSL interpreter at medical appointments.

Services must:

- find out your information needs
- record them in a set way
- highlight them in your records so that staff meet your needs every time you use services
- share your information needs with other services e.g. if you give details to your GP then these can be shared with any hospital service you maybe referred to
- make sure you get support the way you need including when your needs vary. For example you may need to receive short letters in large print but need longer documents on audio.
- ask on a regular basis if your needs have changed

Remember - tell services it is your right to have your needs addressed and they have to do this by law ([section 250 of the Health and Social Care Act 2012](#))

Read more from NHS England about the [Accessible Information Standard](#).

This information was produced in partnership with:

[Connected Voice Advocacy](#) supports people to have a voice about their rights and choices.

Connected Voice HAREF is a network focused on reducing health inequalities for people in black minoritised communities.

North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care board (NENC ICB) work with 64 GP practices and you the people living in Newcastle and Gateshead to improve the quality and experience of health services so that you can live a happier, healthier life. This has replaced the Newcastle Gateshead Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG).

Last updated: February 9, 2024

Useful Organisations

NHS

Website: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

Website: www.nhs.uk/111

Connected Voice Haref

Email: haref@connectedvoice.org.uk

Website: <https://connectedvoice.org.uk/services/haref>

Telephone: 0191 235 7022

Address: Connected Voice Haref, NE1 4BX

Connected Voice Advocacy

Email: advocacy@connectedvoice.org.uk

Website: <http://www.connectedvoice.org.uk/services/advocacy>

Telephone: 0191 235 7013

Extended GP Access at Lemington Resource Centre

Telephone: 0191 235 7013

Address: Lemington Resource Centre, NE15 8RZ

Emergency Services - Fire, Police, Ambulance

Website:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/999-and-112-the-uks-national-emergency-numbers>

Telephone: 999

North East North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB)

Email: necsu.nenc-icb.contactus@nhs.net

Website: www.northeastnorthcumbria.nhs.uk

Telephone: 999

Address: Integrated Care Board, NE15 8NY

The Patients Association

Email: helpline@patients-association.org.uk

Website: www.patients-association.org.uk

Telephone: 999

Address: P Block, HA1 3UJ

Related Articles

[10 Tips for good health](#)

[How to complain about health services](#)

[Your Doctor or GP](#)

Opticians

Getting to hospital

Interpreting and translation

Walk-in centres (Urgent Treatment Centres)

Urgent medical help from NHS 111