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You and your general practice – English

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This guide tells you what to expect from your general practice (GP) and how you can help them, so you get the best from the National Health Service (NHS). More details can be found through the links below.

When and how can you contact your general practice?

Your general practice is open from **8.00am to 6.30pm, Monday to Friday**.

Throughout these hours you, or your carer on your behalf, can:

- Visit the practice
- Call them
- Go online using the practice's website or the **NHS App.**

You can choose the way you contact your practice based on what is best for you. Some practices may have longer hours or may ask that you contact them via phone or in person for urgent queries.

What if the practice is closed?

If you need urgent help for your physical or mental health when the general practice is closed, and you cannot wait until they open, go online to 111.nhs.uk (https://111.nhs.uk/) or call **111**. They will tell you what to do next.

What if it's an emergency?

If it's a serious or life-threatening emergency, go straight to **A&E** (Accident and Emergency) or call **999**.

What happens when you contact your practice to request an appointment?

Whether you make your request by phone, on-line or visiting your practice, you may be asked to give your practice some details so that they can assess what is best for you based on your clinical need. The practice team will consider your request for an appointment or medical advice and tell you **within one working day** what will happen next.

This could be:

- An appointment that day or a subsequent day
- A phone call that day or a subsequent day
- A text message responding to your query
- Advice to go to a pharmacy or another NHS service.

Your practice will decide what is best for you based on your clinical need.

Your practice cannot tell you to just call back the next day.

Who might help you?

You might be offered a face-to-face appointment or a phone call with a GP or other member of the practice staff, like a nurse or pharmacist.

If you have a carer, they can speak for you with your consent.

You can ask to see a preferred healthcare professional, and the practice will try to meet your request, although you might have to wait longer for that person to be available.

It can be helpful to see the same healthcare professional, particularly if you have a long-term health condition.

From what age can you see a GP on your own?

If you are **16 or older**, you can make and go to appointments by yourself.

If you are **under 16**, you can still ask to see a GP without your parent or guardian. The GP will decide if that's appropriate for you.

What if you need extra help?

If you do not speak English, you can ask for interpretation services in your preferred language when you make an appointment.

If you need extra help like longer appointments, a quiet space, wheelchair access, or information in a different format, tell your practice and they will try to help.

How do you choose a general practice?

You can:

- Call or visit a local practice
- Use Find a GP online (https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-gp).

If you want to change to a new general practice you can do so at any point. Most people have a few choices nearby.

Do you need ID or proof of address?

No, you do not need ID, an NHS number or proof of address. It can help the practice if you do, but it is not needed to register or see a GP. You can also register with a practice if you are homeless.

Can a practice say no to registering you?

They must write to you within **14 days** if they say no and explain why. A practice can only say no for a good reason, like if you live too far away or their patient list is closed. For example, they **cannot** say no for reasons such as immigration status, not having a permanent address, or for reasons connected with other characteristics protected under equalities legislation.

Can you choose which hospital or clinic you are referred to?

If your GP needs to refer you for a physical or mental health condition, in most cases you have the right to choose the hospital or service you'd like to go to. You can get further information on your right to choose on the nhs.uk website (https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/about-the-nhs/your-choices-in-the-nhs/).

If you are new to the UK

You can still register with a GP. It's free to use and your **immigration status does not affect your right to register with a GP**.

If you are away from home but still in the UK

If you are away from home for more than 24 hours (but less than 3 months), you can register as a **temporary patient** near where you're staying.

You can also change your nominated pharmacy so you can get your medicine nearby. You can do this by contacting your practice or via the NHS App.

Do general practices charge for anything?

NHS GP services are **free**. Sometimes, if you ask the GP to do private work (like writing a letter for insurance), they may charge a fee.

How should everyone be treated?

The practice should treat everyone fairly, kindly and respectfully. Likewise, you should also treat staff with respect. The practice can remove patients from their list if they are violent or abusive to staff.

To learn more about your rights, you can read the NHS Constitution (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-nhs-constitution-for-england/the-nhs-constitution-for-england).

How can you help your general practice?

1. **Be prepared:** Before an appointment, think about writing down your symptoms, what you are worried about and what you want to talk about.
2. **Be on time:** Being late for an appointment or being unavailable for a timed call-back can affect other patients.
3. **Cancel if needed:** If you can't go to your appointment, tell the practice as soon as you can, so that they can offer it to someone else.
4. **Use the NHS App or website:** If you're confident using smart phones or computers, you can book or cancel appointments, order repeat prescriptions, and see your test results online.
5. **Turn on notifications:** If you use the NHS App, turn on notifications so the practice can contact you more easily. Please keep an eye out for messages.
6. **Order repeat medicines on time:** Make sure you ask for repeat prescriptions on time, so you don't run out, and only order what you need.
7. **Join the Patient Participation Group**: You practice will have a group of patients who can offer feedback on the services it delivers. Your practice website should explain how you can join.

How can you give feedback or raise concerns?

If you want to give feedback, raise a concern or wish to make a formal complaint, ask to speak to the practice manager. If you don't feel comfortable doing this, contact your integrated care board (ICB) – the local NHS body that oversees GPs practices. You can find your local integrated care on the NHS England website (https://www.england.nhs.uk/contact-us/about-nhs-services/contact-your-local-integrated-care-board-icb/).

You can also give feedback about your practice to your local Healthwatch. Their job is to make sure NHS leaders and other decision-makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. Healthwatch is independent and impartial,

and any information you share with them is confidential. To find your local Healthwatch visit the Healthwatch website (https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/your-local-healthwatch/list).

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Translated versions

Arabic (https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/you-and-your-general-practice-arabic/)	Italian (https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/you-and-your-general-practice-italian/)
Bengali (https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/you-and-your-general-practice-bengali/)	Dutch (https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/you-and-your-general-practice-dutch/)
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