

GPs

What to expect from your doctor

A GP is a doctor that can give you treatment and care for your physical and mental health. This factsheet explains how a GP decides what treatment and care to give you. And how to prepare for a GP appointment.



KEY POINTS

- GPs can provide treatment for mental health problems and offer long-term care and support.
- You can ask if there is a GP at your surgery who has an interest in mental health problems.
- It can help to write down a list of things you'd like to talk about with the GP. Such as symptoms or side-effects of medication.
- A GP will ask you about your mental and physical health and may make a diagnosis.
- A GP can refer you to a psychiatrist if they need to.
- You can change GPs as long as you are within their catchment area.

This factsheet covers:

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- [2. What happens at an appointment?](#)
- [3. What happens next?](#)
- [4. What should I do if I have any problems?](#)
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1. How can I prepare for a GP appointment?

What if I don't have a GP?

You need to register with a local GP surgery to see a GP.

You can find your local surgeries on the NHS Choices page here:
www.nhs.uk/service directories/Pages/ServiceSearch.aspx.

Or you can dial 111 to call 'NHS 111.' You can ask them for local surgery contact details. You usually need to be in a surgery's catchment area to register there. The catchment area is the local area that the surgery covers. GP surgeries can take patients from outside their area, but they don't have to.¹

To register at a GP surgery, ask at their reception for a registration form. You might be able to do this online. The form will ask general questions such as your name, address, date of birth and details of your previous GP.²

You can register as a temporary patient if you are going to be in the area for less than 3 months.³ After 3 months you will need to register there as a permanent patient. You can register at a GP surgery if you are homeless. You can use a friend's address, the address of a day centre or the address of the GP surgery when you register.⁴

In some areas you can see a GP by going to a walk-in service. You do not need to be a registered patient to visit these centres. Use the above link or call '111' to find your nearest walk-in centre.

Making an appointment

Once you are registered you can make an appointment with a GP. You will need to contact the GP surgery to make an appointment. You can choose to see the first GP available. Or you can choose to book an appointment with a specific GP. You can try and book an appointment with the same GP if you have a follow up appointment. You do not need to tell the receptionist why you want an appointment.

When you book your appointment you can ask the receptionist if there is a GP with an interest in mental health. You can also ask to see a male or female GP.⁵

The waiting time for an appointment to see a GP will be different at different GP surgeries. It can be a few weeks. Ask at reception for an emergency appointment if you need to see someone urgently. You might not be able to see your regular GP if you ask for an emergency appointment.

Some surgeries offer telephone appointments. Speak to reception to find out. A GP will call you to talk about your problems or any follow-up care.

Before the appointment

Write down what you want to talk about in the appointment. And what you want to get from the appointment. This can help if you are feeling anxious or worried, and can help you remember the questions you want to ask.

Write down a list of your symptoms. And if they get worse at certain times or when you do certain things. Write down anything else that you think your doctor needs to know, such as any medication you're taking.

A mood diary can help you keep track of your symptoms, how you're feeling and how your mood affects you. We have included a mood diary at the end of this factsheet.

Can I take someone with me?

Yes. This might be a close friend, relative or advocate. An advocate is someone outside of the NHS who can offer you support and help you to get your voice heard by your GP.

Your friend or relative could go into the appointment with you or you can ask them to wait for you.

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2. What happens at an appointment?

During the appointment your GP will ask you questions about your mental and physical health. Try and be as honest as possible with your GP. Give them as much detail as you can about how you're feeling and what your symptoms are.⁶ This will help them decide what can help you.

A GP could:

- give advice on things like sleep or stress,
- prescribe you medication,
- pass your details on to a talking therapy service, or
- pass your details on to a specialist mental health team.

Your GP should not usually prescribe you antipsychotic medication unless they have had advice from a psychiatrist.⁷

Ask why you have been given a certain treatment. Your GP should tell you how it can help you and explain possible side effects. Ask how well it works and what you should do if it doesn't work. Ask if there is anything else you can do to help yourself.

You could ask for advice on the following.

- Smoking

- Alcohol or drugs
- Exercise
- Flu injections

Appointments last around 10 minutes. For some people this is not enough time. When you make your appointment, ask for a longer appointment if you think you will need more time.⁸

Your treatment and care through your GP is free, but you may need to pay for a prescription if you need medication.

You can check what treatment is recommended for your condition on the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines. NICE produce guidelines for how health professionals should treat certain conditions. You can download these from their website at www.nice.org.uk. But the NHS does not have to follow these recommendations.

The GP will write down what you talk about in your appointment. This will include your symptoms and any treatment they give you or offer to you. The GP will record this on your medical notes. Your notes will be kept confidential. This means they should not pass them on to anyone else unless you agree or it is necessary to.⁹

You can find more information about '**Confidentiality**' at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

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3. What happens next?

You can arrange a follow-up appointment with your GP. You might want a follow-up appointment if:

- you have any problems with your treatment,
- you are not getting better, or
- your symptoms get worse.

You can ask to arrange the next appointment while you are with the GP.

If you have been given medication your GP might offer check ups to see how it is working and how you are feeling. You might be able to go to a Medicines Use Review (MUR) with your pharmacist if you are on medication for a long time. An MUR is an appointment with a pharmacist to check how you are getting on with your medicine.¹⁰

Your GP may refer you to a specialist mental health team to get more experienced help. They might do this if your GP:

- has tried all options,
- thinks your problems are too complex for them to deal with, or

- feels you are at risk of suicide or self-harm.

Your GP will take over your mental health care if you are discharged from a specialist mental health team or the Care Programme Approach.¹¹

You can find more information about:

- Care Programme Approach
- Community Mental Health Team
- Crisis Team
- Early Intervention
- Assertive Outreach

at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheets.

Physical health

Your GP will look after your physical health needs if you are referred to mental health services.

Your GP should do a physical health check for you every year if you have a severe mental illness.^{12, 13} Severe mental illness includes schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, schizoaffective disorder and psychosis. People with these conditions are at higher risk of certain physical health conditions.¹⁴

GP surgeries usually hold a list of all patients at the practice who have severe mental illness or take antipsychotic medication. This reminds the GP or nurse to contact you when a check is due. A health check may include taking your blood pressure, taking your pulse, doing a urine or blood test or weighing you.¹⁵

You can find out more about physical health in our '**Good health guide**' at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy.

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4. What should I do if I have any problems?

If you have problems with your GP you could try the following options.

Change your GP

Ask at reception or look online to see if there is another GP with an interest or background in mental health. You could arrange follow up appointments with them instead.

You might be able to change your GP surgery. You can usually only join surgeries if they cover the area you live in. You do not need to tell them why you want to change.¹⁶

Ask for more support

GP surgeries have to be flexible to help people with mental illness use their service. You could ask for changes in the way they support you. This is called making reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010.¹⁷

You could ask for the following.

- To book your appointment later in the day or the previous day. Some surgeries only offer same-day appointments. You usually have to phone early in the morning. You may not be able to get up early enough if you are on certain medication.
- Appointment reminders if you think you might forget your appointment because of your condition. The surgery could send you a text or give you an appointment card.
- Ask to wait in a different waiting area. It is reasonable to ask for this if you find it difficult to wait for your appointment with other patients.
- Ask for a longer appointment.

You can find more information about reasonable adjustments and **Discrimination and Mental Illness** at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

Use community advocacy

A community advocate could help you to ask for reasonable adjustments at your GP surgery. Or help you to speak to your GP about your treatment or care. An advocate is usually free and independent from health services. They help to make your voice heard.

Community advocacy services are not available in all areas. You can search online for a local service or ask the Rethink Mental Illness Advice Service to search for you. You can call us on 0300 5000 927.

Contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

You can contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) if you feel unhappy with how your care is being handled. PALS can try to sort out any problems or questions you have. Your GP surgery should be able to give you their details. Or you can look online using the website in the '[useful contacts](#)' section at the end of this factsheet.

Make a complaint

You can complain if you are not happy with your GP or the surgery. You should make a complaint directly to your GP surgery first. You may be able to get an apology or get the treatment that you would like if you complain.

Make a complaint to the GMC

You can complain to the General Medical Council (GMC) you think your GP needs to be investigated. All doctors have to be registered with the GMC..

The GMC may investigate your doctor for the following reasons.¹⁸

- Serious or repeated mistakes in your care. Such as mistakes in your diagnosis or they have given you drugs in a dangerous way.
- Not examining you properly or not looking after your needs.
- Doesn't understand the English language well enough to understand patients.
- Abuse of their position. Such as an improper sexual or emotional relationship with you.
- Discrimination against you.
- Serious breach of your confidentiality.

The GMC may stop your doctor from practicing. Or may reduce what your doctor is able to do.

The GMC will not be able to get you an apology. Or get you the treatment that you would like.

The GMC details are in the '[Useful contacts](#)' section at the end of this factsheet.

You can find more information about '**Complaints**' at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

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5. What if I am a carer, friend or relative?

You might want to share information with your relative's GP. GP's are allowed to listen to your concerns. It can help them to make a decision about what care is needed. But they will not be able to share information with you unless your relative has told them they can. They might tell your relative or friend that you spoke to them.¹⁹

You can find more about '**Confidentiality for carers, friends and relatives**' at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

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6. What if I need help in a crisis?

You might need to see someone quickly if you are in a mental health crisis.

- Your GP might be able to help you get support in a crisis. A GP should be available to speak to you 24 hours a day. If you call your surgery when it's closed there will be a message to tell you who to call.
- NHS 111 service can help you if you don't have a GP or you do not know who to call. Dial 111 on your phone, it is free. The line is open 24 hours a day 7 days a week.
- Call your local crisis team.
- Go to the nearest Accident & Emergency Department at your local hospital.
- Call 999 and ask for an ambulance in an emergency.

You can find more information about '**Getting help in a crisis**' at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

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The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)

NICE produce guidance for the NHS on how to treat certain mental health conditions. You can download these for free from the NICE website.

Telephone: 0300 323 0140

Address: 10 Spring Gardens, London, SW1A 2BU

Email: nice@nice.org.uk

Website: <https://www.nice.org.uk/>

NHS Choices

You can use this website to search for GP surgeries, hospitals or walk-in centres in your area

Website: www.nhs.uk/servicedirector/Pages/ServiceSearch.aspx

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

You can contact your local PALS service if you are having a problem with your GP, or GP surgery. You can search for your local PALS using the website below.

Website: [www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Patient-advice-and-liaison-services-\(PALS\)/LocationSearch/363](http://www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Patient-advice-and-liaison-services-(PALS)/LocationSearch/363)

General Medical Council (GMC)

You can complain to the GMC about your GP if you think that your doctor needs to be investigated.

Telephone: 0161 923 6602

Website: www.gmc-uk.org/index.asp



Appointment Planner

Date of appointment: _____

Time of appointment: _____

Longer appointment needed? Yes No

How am I feeling?

Mood diary – Use this to record how you feel over the course of a few days or a fortnight

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10	Day 11	Day 12	Day 13	Day 14
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What would I like from the appointment?

Medication I'm taking:

Am I experiencing side effects from any medication?

- No
- Yes (What are these?)

Would I like to change my medication?

- No
- Yes



- ¹ NHS Choices. *Choosing a GP*.
<http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/AboutNHSservices/doctors/Pages/NHSGPs.aspx> (Accessed 30th September 2016).
- ² NHS. *GSM1 Family doctor services registration*.
<http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/AboutNHSservices/doctors/Documents/GMS1-Jul12.pdf> (Accessed 30th September 2016).
- ³ NHS Choices. *How to register as a temporary patient?*
<http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/AboutNHSservices/doctors/Pages/NHSGPs.aspx> (Accessed 30th September 2016).
- ⁴ NHS Choices. *How to register as a homeless patient?*
<http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/AboutNHSservices/doctors/Pages/NHSGPs.aspx> (Accessed 30th September 2016).
- ⁵ NHS Choices. *Can I choose to see a male or female GP?*
<http://www.nhs.uk/chq/Pages/2415.aspx?CategoryID=68&SubCategoryID=158> (Accessed 30th September 2016).
- ⁶ NHS Choices. *GP Appointments and bookings*.
<http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/AboutNHSservices/doctors/Pages/gp-appointments.aspx> (Accessed 30th September 2016).
- ⁷ National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. *Psychosis and schizophrenia in adults*. 2014: pg 7.
<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg178/ifp/chapter/antipsychotic-medication> (accessed 30th September 2016).
- ⁸ As note 6.
- ⁹ General Medical Council (GMC). *Confidentiality*. Manchester: General Medical Council; 2009. Page 7, para 9.
- ¹⁰ NHS Choices. *Medicines Use Review (MUR) Service*.
<http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/AboutNHSservices/pharmacists/Pages/pharmacistsandchemists.aspx> (Accessed 30th September 2016).
- ¹¹ Department of Health. *Refocusing the Care Programme Approach: Policy and Positive Practice Guidance*. London: Department of Health; 2008. Page 15.
- ¹² National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. *Psychosis and schizophrenia in adults: prevention and management*. Clinical Guidance 178. London: National Institute for Health and Care Excellence; 2014. Page 28, para 1.5.3.1.
- ¹³ National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. *Bipolar Disorder: assessment and management*. Clinical Guidance 185. London: National Institute for Health and Care Excellence; 2014. Page 19, para 1.2.10.
- ¹⁴ Disability Rights Commission. *Equal Treatment: Closing the Gap*. London: Disability Rights Commission; 2006. Page 1.
- ¹⁵ As note 12, at para 1.3.6.4
- ¹⁶ NHS Choices. *How do I change my GP?*
<http://www.nhs.uk/chq/Pages/1088.aspx?CategoryID=68&SubCategoryID=158> (Accessed 30th September 2016).
- ¹⁷ s20, Equality Act 2010.
- ¹⁸ General Medical Council. *Making a complaint about a doctor*.
<http://www.gmc-uk.org/concerns/23339.asp> (Accessed 14 October 2016).
- ¹⁹ As note 9, para 66.

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This factsheet is available
in large print.



Rethink Mental Illness Advice Service

Phone 0300 5000 927

Monday to Friday, 9:30am to 4pm
(excluding bank holidays)

Email advice@rethink.org

Did this help?

We'd love to know if this information helped you.

Drop us a line at: feedback@rethink.org

or write to us at Rethink Mental Illness:

RAIS
PO Box 17106
Birmingham B9 9LL

or call us on 0300 5000 927.

We're open 9:30am to 4pm
Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays)



Leading the way to a better
quality of life for everyone
affected by severe mental illness.

For further information
on Rethink Mental Illness
Phone 0121 522 7007
Email info@rethink.org

 [facebook.com/rethinkcharity](https://www.facebook.com/rethinkcharity)

 twitter.com/rethink_

 www.rethink.org

Need more help?

Go to www.rethink.org for information on symptoms, treatments, money and benefits and your rights.

Don't have access to the web?

Call us on 0121 522 7007. We are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, and we will send you the information you need in the post.

Need to talk to an adviser?

If you need practical advice, call us on 0300 5000 927 between 9:30am to 4pm, Monday to Friday. Our specialist advisers can help you with queries like how to apply for benefits, get access to care or make a complaint.

Can you help us to keep going?

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