



Getting the most from your GP surgery

GP surgeries have changed the way they work to meet patient needs and increased demand. There is now a wider range of medical staff at surgeries and different ways to get help such as telephone, video, and online consultations, as well as face-to-face appointments.

Access to GP services is an issue we hear about regularly at Healthwatch Northumberland. Here we explain more about the range of staff roles at surgeries, different ways to access healthcare and how to make the most of your GP appointment.



Why do I have to tell the receptionist so much about my health condition or concern?

Reception staff need to ask enough questions to make sure you get the best appointment with the right person. This may not always be your GP, as there are specialist services that may be more appropriate for your needs, for example, a dietician for concerns around food allergies or intolerances.

Some specialist services that may now be available at your GP surgery are listed overleaf, although not all will be available at every surgery.

Advanced Practitioners

include nurses, pharmacists, paramedics, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, dieticians or podiatrists. They can help with a variety of health conditions and can prescribe medication and make referrals to other specialist services.

Clinical Pharmacists

can carry out medication reviews, particularly for long-term and chronic health conditions. Some can also prescribe medication and manage prescriptions.

Care Coordinators

ensure patients have more joined-up care and that their care needs are met, particularly for those who are frail and/or elderly, and people with long-term health conditions.

Dieticians

diagnose and treat dietary and nutritional problems, give advice on food and nutrition, and offer support with diabetes, digestive issues, food allergies and intolerances and weight loss/gain.

General Practice Nurses

can do many of the same tasks as GPs. They assess and treat people of all ages, provide wound care, screenings and blood tests, as well as vaccinations. They also offer advice on contraception, women and men's health issues, weight loss and stopping smoking.

Health and Wellness Coaches

find solutions or lifestyle changes to enable people to lead happier lives. They help people to form a personalised health and care plan to achieve their goals.

Mental Health Practitioners

support people with severe mental health illness to live well in their communities. They can work with patients whose mental health needs cannot be met through, for example, talking therapies, but who may not need care from more specialist services such as psychiatric care. They can often help children and young people as well as adults and can help make referrals to suitable services for support.

Occupational Therapists

work with ill, disabled or injured patients, including those who have returned home following a hospital stay. They help with adaptations to people's homes so they can continue to live independently.

Physician Associates

work alongside GPs. They cannot prescribe medication but can prepare prescriptions for GPs to sign and can diagnose, order tests and make referrals.

Physiotherapists

work with patients who have joint or muscle problems including those recovering from serious injuries or illness and those with new injuries. They can book scans and tests and are trained to recognise when a joint or muscle problem may be a sign of something more serious. Patients can often make an appointment with a physiotherapist directly themselves (self-refer) or can be referred by a GP or other healthcare professional.

Paramedics

can provide a rapid response to patients with long-term conditions, minor injuries and minor illness. They can supply a range of medicines and support patients who require wound care, have fallen, or have musculoskeletal problems, and can treat some types of infections.

Podiatrists

can diagnose and treat foot and lower leg conditions and provide foot care for short-term or long-term conditions.

Social Prescribing Link Workers

help address the non-medical issues that may be affecting your health and wellbeing. They can connect you to local services and community groups for practical or emotional support.

I need an appointment with my GP – why can't I get through on the telephone?

Long telephone queues and the '8am rush' can make it hard to book a GP appointment. If your issue is non-urgent, for example, a routine appointment, you may find it easier to call your surgery later in the day when it is less busy. Some surgeries give specific times in the day for patients to ring for test results or repeat prescriptions. You can contact your surgery to find out what the procedures are.

What other ways can I book an appointment with my GP?

Using other ways to book GP appointments can not only make it quicker for you, but also help free up telephone lines for more urgent queries or for those who are unable to use alternative online methods.



eConsult is an online system which you can access via your GP surgery's website or the NHS app. It is a form which takes you (or someone acting on your behalf) through a series of questions about your symptoms or health condition. GP staff review the form then get in touch with you to make sure you get the right care. The form will identify if you need more urgent care and direct you to a more appropriate service.

eConsult can also be used for help with fit notes, test results or doctors' letters. Sometimes eConsult maybe turned off by your surgery or limited to certain times to help manage the number of patient requests.

NHS App is free to download from app stores if you have access to a smartphone, computer or tablet. The app allows you to order repeat prescriptions, book certain vaccinations, provides self-care information and gives you access to your healthcare records (although your surgery may request to see ID before you are able to access your records).

You may also be able to book and cancel GP appointments depending on your GP surgery arrangements.

GP digital access allows you to manage your healthcare online. Different surgeries use different systems, but most allow you to request repeat prescriptions, access your health records and test results, cancel, change and sometimes book GP appointments. To register, contact your GP surgery.

Will I be able to see my GP face to face?

A telephone or video appointment may be offered as the quickest way to get the healthcare you need. If you would prefer a face-to-face appointment, you should mention this when you call to make the appointment or specify this on your online eConsult form. If you have a disability or health condition that would make face-to-face appointments more appropriate, you should make the GP surgery aware of this.

Will I have enough time to discuss my health issue?

Many GP appointments are limited to ten minutes. To make the most of the time, it is a good idea to write down any symptoms you have before your appointment - when they started, what makes them better or worse and anything you have already tried to improve them. It can also be useful to list any questions you want to ask and details of any medication you take. You may be able to book a double appointment if you feel you have too much to discuss in one appointment. You can ask your GP surgery if this is possible.

During your appointment, tell the GP if you do not understand something. You can take a family member or friend along with you for support or to help you remember details. Before leaving the appointment, you should also make sure that you understand what will happen next, for example, follow up appointments, tests and referrals and when to contact the surgery again.

Why are my GP records incorrect and what can I do about this?

If you feel that information within your records is incorrect or inaccurate, you should speak to your surgery. The staff will be able to answer your questions and set things right when needed.

How can I cancel my GP appointment?

If you no longer need your appointment or can no longer make it, please contact your surgery soon as possible so it can be offered to someone else. Telephone lines can be busy, but it is often possible to cancel via a surgery's online system or via the NHS App. Some surgeries also have the option for patients to cancel appointments via text message.

Who else can I see or speak to for help with my health condition?

A&E or 999 are for serious injuries and life-threatening emergencies only. Amongst other things this would include heavy bleeding, choking, seizures, loss of consciousness, severe difficulties breathing or signs of a stroke or heart attack.



Urgent Treatment Centres treat conditions such as minor head, ear or eye problems, broken noses or nose bleeds, sprains, strains, cuts and bites, children's minor injuries and ailments, minor fractures or broken bones, minor skin abscesses and infections. There are Urgent Treatment Centres at Hexham General Hospital, Wansbeck General Hospital and North Tyneside General Hospital.

Minor Injuries Units or walk-in centres, can help with some of the same problems as Urgent Treatment Centres. There are Minor Injuries Units in Alnwick Infirmary and Berwick Infirmary.

Pharmacies or chemists, can provide advice and over-the-counter medicines for a range of minor illnesses, such as coughs, colds, sore throats, stomach problems, aches and pains. They are also trained to spot when something may be more serious and can direct you to the best place to get suitable help. Many pharmacies are now able to treat a greater range of conditions under the new NHS Pharmacy First advanced service.

NHS 111 can be contacted 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, by telephone or online. This service can direct you to the best place to get help if you cannot contact your GP surgery during the day or when your GP is closed (out of hours).

The service can help to arrange a medical appointment, get an emergency prescription or an emergency dental appointment. 111 cannot issue fit notes (you need to contact your GP) and cannot make or cancel appointments for you in other parts of the NHS. For help or advice for children under five years, you must contact NHS 111 by telephone.

- **Call 111** for adults and children under five (Free from landline and mobile phones)
- **Visit 111.nhs.uk** (for adults and children over 5 yrs)
- **Download the NHS app**
- **Text relay: call 18001 111 using text relay**
- **British Sign Language: use signvideo.co.uk/nhs111**
- **Help in other languages: call 111 and ask for an interpreter**



Self care

Some conditions can be safely managed with self-care at home, including minor sprains and strains, minor cuts and bruises, coughs and colds, sore throats, sinusitis and minor aches and pains. When in doubt, you can seek advice from a pharmacist, your GP website (eConsultation self-help guides) and NHS 111.

Children

Growing Healthy Northumberland 0-19 service includes the health visiting team which provides support and information for families with 0-5 year olds. There is also support available for families with older children. You can contact the service by calling 0300 373 2488 or via the Growing Healthy App.

The Growing Healthy website includes useful information including details of wellbeing clinics across Northumberland.

Other resources which may be useful include the Little Orange Book and the Healthier Together website and App - you can find these by scanning the QR codes below with your smartphone.



Growing Healthy



Little Orange Book



Healthier Together

What should I do if I'm unhappy about the care or treatment I've received at my GP surgery?

Please check your surgery's website or speak to a member of the reception team to request details on how to raise your concern through the correct processes and get the right support. In some cases, it may be more appropriate to raise your concern online or in writing rather than ringing the surgery. Please remember to keep any contact with surgery staff respectful to help them deal with your concern.

Healthwatch Northumberland is your health and social care champion.

We're part of a network of over 150 local Healthwatch across the country.



We're here to listen to the issues that really matter to people in Northumberland and to hear about your experiences of using local health and social care services. As an independent statutory body, we have the power to make sure NHS leaders and other decision makers listen to local feedback and improve standards of care.

We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice through our free Signposting and Information Service.

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