

HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF A VISIT TO YOUR DOCTOR

This factsheet offers tips and advice on how to get the most out of a visit to your doctor.



- Make a list before you go to make sure you cover everything you want to discuss.
- Make a note of how long you have had your symptoms, when they started and how they affect you, including what makes them worse or better.
- Take a relative or friend with you if you're worried.
- Be honest and don't be afraid to ask for more information.

If you have a chest, heart or stroke condition it is likely that you will have to visit your doctor on a fairly regular basis. Whether you are seeing your regular doctor for a routine appointment as part of your ongoing care or you have made an emergency appointment because you suddenly feel unwell, preparing for your appointment will help you get the most from it. It is essential that you feel able to communicate with your doctor and come away with the help or advice you need.

Before you go

Once you have an appointment booked to see your doctor, it can be helpful to plan what you want to discuss before you go. Think about what you want to get out of the visit; is it for advice, is it to change your medication or to discuss a symptom that is worrying you? Often referrals to therapists (for example a physiotherapist) can be made through your GP surgery and this can be discussed at your appointment.

Write down details of your symptoms, when they started, what they are, whether they have changed at all, how they are affecting your life and most importantly how they are making you feel.

List or take all your medicines with you, including vitamins and supplements, especially if you want to discuss a possible change to these or a side effect you might be experiencing.

CHEST HEART & STROKE SCOTLAND

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It is worth remembering that most GP appointments are usually only 10 minutes long so if you feel you have a lot to discuss then it might be worthwhile booking a double appointment if that is possible. If you need someone to translate for you or other communication support, arrange this when you book your appointment.

It can be useful to take a relative or friend with you, particularly if you are feeling unwell or anxious.

Try to arrive on time for your appointment but be prepared to wait if your doctor is running late. Taking a book or newspaper with you may help you pass the time – try not to get frustrated.

Many people like to research their symptoms on the internet before they go to the doctor. While this can sometimes be helpful, you should be cautious about which sites you use. Your doctor can recommend sites that might be useful for you to visit to find out more about your condition once you have been properly diagnosed.



During the appointment

- Try to relax; remember your doctor is there to help you.
- Be honest – if you are asked questions about your lifestyle or whether you have taken your medication then it is best to be completely honest as your doctor can only work with the information you provide.
- Listen carefully to the doctor and if you don't understand or you feel that the doctor has not answered your questions, ask for clarification or further information.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions.
- Check your list, if you had one, at the end of the appointment to make sure you have covered all the points you wanted to.
- If your doctor refers you for tests, ask for more information about what they involve including the risks and benefits. This helps you to know what to expect and be in control of your treatment and care.
- Make sure before you leave that you know what should happen next and when. Write it down if necessary to make sure you remember.
- Ask if there is any written information that you can take away and read later, or a website that will help you understand your condition.

After you leave

Think about what you have discussed with your doctor and whether there is anything you now need to do – for example, you might need to book another appointment or get a prescription. Book any tests you need to and put the dates in your diary.

If you haven't already done so, once you get home it can be helpful to note down what you have discussed and what happens next as a reminder for you and to refer to before your next visit.

If you leave the appointment confused or unhappy or you feel that your doctor wasn't listening to you, make an appointment with another doctor in the practice. It is essential to have good communication with your doctor. If you want a specialist's opinion then you will need to be guided by your doctor but there's no harm in asking.

Useful questions for a visit to your doctor

- Can I check that I've understood what you said?
- Can I have a copy of any letters written about me?
- What are the tests for?
- How and when will I get the results?
- What do you recommend and why?
- Are there any side effects or risks and if so, what are they?
- How long will I need treatment for?
- Does it matter what time of day I take my medication and do I need to eat first?
- Is there anything else I can do to help myself?
- What do I do if the symptoms get worse?
- What happens next?
- Who do I contact if I have more problems or questions?
- Where can I find more information?
- Is there a support group or any other source of help?

Other health professionals who can help

Practice nurses

Sometimes a practice nurse can help you in terms of having a chat about any issues that are worrying you or discussing your medicines, lifestyle changes or help that you might need at home.

Local chemist

Your local pharmacist can offer advice on your symptoms or medicines that you are taking and advise you whether you might then need to see a doctor. They will also provide information about over-the-counter remedies.

Specialist doctor or consultant

You can also contact your specialist doctor or consultant directly if this has previously been agreed. This may have to be initially through his/her secretary.

NHS 24 (Dial 111)

NHS 24 offers an out-of-hours phone service to provide help if your GP surgery is closed and you are too ill to wait until it re-opens. They can direct your call to a suitable health professional, such as a doctor, nurse, or pharmacist.

Advice Line

Advice lines can be a useful source of information and support. If you have been affected by a chest, heart or stroke condition, you can phone the CHSS Advice Line nurses on 0808 801 0899 (free from landlines and mobiles). You can also email them at adviceline@chss.org.uk or text NURSE to 66777.

Useful websites

NHS inform – www.nhsinform.co.uk (0800 22 44 88)

NHS inform provides quality health and care information for the people of Scotland

Chest
Heart &
Stroke
Scotland



If you would like to speak to one of our nurses in confidence,
please call the Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland Advice Line:

0808 801 0899

free to call from landlines and mobiles.