

# Information Sheet

## 30 Your Health Services: Where to Start

This information sheet aims to explain the different primary health care services available to you. It gives you basic information on how to access these services. It also tells you who to contact for advice and information on health issues and how to find out about local services in your area.

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## What is Primary care?

Primary care services are provided by the National Health Service to meet your basic health care needs. They are aimed at keeping you healthy and at treating routine injuries and illnesses. Primary care is also referred to as 'family health services'. It is provided in the community, by people you normally see when you first have a health problem. This includes family doctors, community nurses, opticians, dentists, pharmacists and therapists.

## Your family doctor

Your family doctor (GP) is usually your first contact with the National Health Service. Talking to your doctor is a good starting point if you, or the person you care for, have any health-related problems. Your family doctor can give you general medical advice and treatment and can prescribe medication. GPs can also refer you to other community-based professionals, such as those listed on pages 14 and 15, or to a specialist in a hospital.

## Registering with a family doctor

Everyone should be registered with a family doctor. If you do not already have a family doctor you should join a GP surgery, even if you currently have no health problems. This is important, because it means you will have a doctor close by who has access to your medical records and is aware of your medical history, and who can provide emergency home visits. **Do not wait until you are ill to register with a family doctor.**

Each doctor's practice has a boundary area. You will only be able to register with a GP surgery if you live within its boundary area. If you move to another area outside this boundary you will have to notify your doctor and register with a new practice in your new area. If you remain with your original doctor, not telling them you have moved, you may find that they won't make home visits because you live too far away.

GP surgeries have a maximum number of patients that they can look after. It could happen that a doctor within your area will not accept you on to their patient list because it is already full. If this happens, try a different practice in your area. If you can't find a practice that will take you, then it is the responsibility of your primary care trust (in England), health board (in Wales)

and Scotland) or health and social services trust (in Northern Ireland) to find one for you.

When you have found a doctor's practice in your area, you will need to go into the surgery to register. Take your NHS medical card with you if you have one. You may be asked to fill in a registration form when you go in to register. You will need to know the name of your previous doctor so that your new practice can get your medical records.

After you have registered with your new doctor, you will be asked to go into the surgery to have a 'new patient check'. This is a routine health check-up, usually carried out by the practice nurse. It will give your new doctor information about your immediate health needs and medication.

When you register, your GP practice should give you information that tells you:

- the name(s) of the doctor(s) in your practice
- the surgery opening hours
- how the appointment system works
- how to collect repeat prescriptions
- what to do if you need treatment outside surgery hours or at home

## Visiting your GP

Call your surgery and make an appointment to see your doctor. Check with your practice how to do this. For example, you may have to telephone your practice at a particular time if you want an appointment that day. It is very important that you keep your appointment and try to arrive on time. If you are not going to be able to go to your appointment you should let your doctor know as early as possible. This will mean that someone else can have your appointment.

Government guidelines say that your doctor should try to see you within 48 hours of you asking for an appointment. However, in some cases you may have to wait longer. If you are not feeling well and need to see a doctor immediately, most GP surgeries offer emergency appointments or hold 'open surgeries'. Open surgeries operate on a 'first come, first served' basis, so you may have to wait for some time before a doctor can see you.

In many practices you will be able to speak to a doctor or nurse on the telephone, but you will need to phone the practice at an agreed time or be

available for your doctor to call you back. Many problems can be dealt with over the phone, saving you the hassle of travelling to the surgery and a long wait in the waiting room. Many GP practices are setting up systems to assess whether patients need an appointment or a home visit, or if their problem can be dealt with by phone. These are called **triage** systems.

Check with your practice whether they have emergency appointments, open surgeries or a triage system and ask them how they work.

Your appointment

It is important to try and get the most out of your doctor's appointment. You will probably only have about five to ten minutes with your doctor, so it is a good idea to try and prepare for your appointment. Think about what you want to discuss with your doctor. It can be useful to take some notes along with you to help you remember everything you want to tell your doctor or ask about.

- Think about the main reason you are visiting your doctor. You may have a new health problem (for example you may have had a fall). You may be making a follow-up visit for a longer-term problem (for example you may have recently had a stroke or be unhappy with your current medication). Or you could be visiting your doctor for a general health check-up.
- Try to concentrate on one health issue at a time. If you need to see your doctor about more than one problem ask for a double appointment.
- Try to be clear about any symptoms you have (for example where there is pain and what kind of pain) and how you are feeling.
- You may have had health problems over a period of time before visiting your doctor. Try to write down when the problems occurred and any factors you think may have played a role. Is this problem getting worse and worse? Or does it come and go?
- Think about what questions you would like to ask your doctor.

During your appointment it is important that you feel comfortable and can give your doctor the information they need. It's also important to make sure you get the information and advice you need and understand what your doctor tells you.

- Try to be open and honest with your doctor. Remember that everything you say is confidential. Don't just put on a 'brave face' when your doctor asks you questions. Thinking positively is not a bad thing, but your doctor needs to know the full extent of your health problem. If you don't tell your doctor how you are feeling, they will have to guess!

- Ask questions. If you don't understand something your doctor has said, ask them to explain it to you. If necessary you can ask your doctor to write down the answers and explanations.
- You may find it useful to take some notes when the doctor is talking to you. It is easy to forget what your doctor said after you leave the surgery.
- You may find it helpful to take someone with you. Having a friend or relative present can make some people feel more comfortable. It can also help to have someone else there to ask questions if you are uncomfortable doing so yourself.

I won't visit the doctor because...

It is important to see your family doctor if you have any health-related problems. The quicker a problem is spotted and diagnosed, the better the chances that it can be dealt with. It also increases the likelihood of you having a better quality of life. But there are various reasons why people put off visiting their doctor, even if they are feeling very ill.

- *'I don't want to bother the doctor.'* Many people feel that they are causing a fuss and don't want to waste their doctor's time. If you are feeling ill it is important to seek medical advice. Remember that your doctor is there to help keep you in good health as well as to cure you. It is better for a health problem to be discovered early by your family doctor, than for you to end up being rushed to hospital. If you really don't think that it is necessary to see a doctor, you could ask to see the practice nurse. Or you can first try to get advice over the telephone from a nurse or doctor at your practice (see page 3) or by calling an information service (see the section on 'Information and advice' on page 19). It is important not to ignore your health problem – you should at least speak to someone who can make a professional assessment of whether you need to see a doctor.
- *'I'm scared that if I go to see my doctor I may find out something is wrong with me.'* It is quite common for people to put off going to see their doctor because they are afraid of what they might be told. You should always tell your doctor if you think you have a health problem. Remember that the earlier you tell your doctor that you are worried about your health, the better the chances that any problem can be resolved. The longer you leave it, the more serious and complicated it can get. It could even be that the problem is less serious than you fear, and you will have saved yourself a lot of unnecessary worry!

- *'I don't like my doctor.'* Sometimes people find that they don't get on well with their doctor. This can make them uncomfortable about making an appointment when they need to. There are several things you can do if you feel like this. If your practice has more than one doctor (most practices do) you could ask to see a different doctor. For many health problems you can also ask to see the practice nurse, rather than your doctor. Another option is for you to change to a different GP practice. There is nothing to stop you changing your doctor, providing you can find another practice in your area that can take you on to their patient list. If you are unhappy with the way you have been treated by your doctor you can make a complaint. See our information sheet no. 27 'How to Make a Complaint'.

What if I'm ill but my doctor's surgery is closed?

Sometimes you may be very ill and need to see a doctor outside normal surgery opening hours. For example, you may fall ill over the weekend when your doctor's practice is closed. If this happens, you (or a friend or relative) should call your GP surgery. You will either get through to a duty doctor or there will be a recorded message telling you how you can contact the doctor on duty. Most GPs have formed co-operatives with other practices to provide out-of-hours care, so the doctor you see will not necessarily be from your practice.

If you are in England or Wales you can also contact **NHS Direct** on **0845 4647** for advice from a nurse 24 hours a day. NHS Direct can also give you the number of a GP out-of-hours service. If you are living in Scotland call **NHS 24** on **0845 4 24 24 24**. There is no similar line in Northern Ireland, but your local health and social services board can give details of primary care services in your area including your GP out-of-hours service. For more details see page 19.

What if I'm too ill to get to my doctor?

You or your partner may be too unwell or infirm to visit your doctor, for example if you are terminally ill or bed-bound. If you are unable to visit your GP surgery for medical reasons, you can ask your doctor to make a **home visit**. Call your GP surgery. Your doctor may be able to give you advice over the phone and will visit you if they think it is necessary. If possible, try to call your doctor in the morning if you think you need a visit the same day.

What if I'm not registered with a GP or am away from home?

You should always be able to see a doctor if you need urgent attention. If you are away from home or have not registered with a family doctor and you fall ill, you should contact the nearest GP surgery and ask them to see you.

If you are staying somewhere for less than three months, you can register with a local GP as a temporary resident. If you are going to be living somewhere for more than three months you should register with a local doctor as a permanent resident.

What if I move into a care home?

Everyone has the right to be treated by a family doctor, whether or not you are living in a care home. If you move into a care home in your area you may be able to keep the same doctor if this is what you want. You will need to ask your doctor if this is possible. If your doctor is not able to carry on treating you, ask your care home for advice on which GP practice you should join. Care homes often have a number of local doctors that treat residents. If you move into a care home in a different area you will have to register with a new doctor. Your care home should be able to tell you which local doctors treat the other residents.

## Prescriptions

Everyone aged 60 and over automatically qualifies for free prescriptions. Simply tick the relevant box on the back of the prescription and complete and sign the declaration in the space provided before handing it over the counter at the pharmacy. Usually the prescription will have your date of birth printed on it, but if it doesn't you will have to show proof that you are over 60. You can do this by showing an official document with your name and date of birth on, such as your NHS medical card or driving licence.

Some pharmacies will deliver your prescription to you at home if you are housebound and unable to get out. Ask your pharmacist if they can do this and whether or not there will be a charge.

## You and your dentist

Ideally, everyone should be registered with a dentist for regular NHS check-ups and dental treatment known as ‘continuing care’.

Registration with a NHS dentist lasts for a period of **15 months** and is renewed each time you visit. If you don’t see your dentist in that time you will need to re-register or you may lose your entitlement to NHS treatment at your dental practice. The easiest way to make sure your registration doesn’t lapse is to see your dentist every year for a check-up. If you have not seen your dentist within the last 15 months, check with the practice to make sure that you are still registered.

### Do I have to register with a dentist to get treatment?

You don’t have to be registered with a dentist to get treatment – you can ask to be seen as an occasional patient. But generally, you will be restricted in the kind of NHS treatment offered and you won’t have the same rights as a continuing care patient. Some dentists will only accept occasional patients on a private basis.

You may have a Dental Access Centre in your area, especially if there is a lack of NHS dentists registering new patients. Anyone who is not currently registered with an NHS dentist will be able to get advice and NHS treatment at these centres or information on other local NHS dental services. But, you may find that your local Dental Access Centre will prioritise patients needing more urgent treatment.

### What if I need emergency treatment?

If you are registered with an NHS dentist for continuing care, you should be able to get emergency treatment as soon as appropriate – usually with 24 hours of contacting them. If you need urgent treatment, contact your surgery. Most surgeries have answer machines giving out-of-hours information.

Dentists do not have to accept unregistered people for emergency treatment. If you are not registered with a dentist and do not have a local Dental Access Centre, you may have to ‘ring around’ to find a local dentist who can treat you as an emergency NHS patient. Some dentists will only accept emergency patients on a private basis.

## How do I find an NHS dentist or Dental Access Centre?

A good way of finding a dentist offering NHS treatment is to ask family or friends for a recommendation. You can also look in the telephone book or:

- If you are living in **England or Wales**, call **NHS Direct** on **0845 4647**, who can give you a list of local NHS dentists. They can tell you if the practices are taking on new patients, or offer occasional and emergency dental treatment on the NHS.
- In **Northern Ireland**, contact your local **health and social services board** and ask for the 'dental department' – see page 19 for contact details.
- In **Scotland** call the **NHS helpline** on **0800 224488** for a list of local dentists.

Unfortunately, in some areas of the UK it is becoming more and more difficult to find an NHS dentist. You may have to try a few dental practices before you find one willing to accept you as an NHS patient. Your local primary care trust (in England and Wales), health board (in Scotland) or health and social services board (in Northern Ireland) has a duty to provide NHS dental services in your area. If you have difficulty finding a dentist ask if they can help you. Their details should be listed in your local phonebook or available from the organisation that deals with your country in the above list.

A dentist cannot be made to take on NHS patients and they can change from NHS to private if they want to. Before you have any dental treatment, it is a good idea to double-check with your dentist that you are definitely an NHS patient.

## What if I can't get to a dentist without difficulty?

If you have problems getting around, check that you will be able to get into the dentist's premises and into the surgery – sometimes stairs can be a problem. If you are housebound and can't get out, you might be able to get a home visit from a dentist at no extra cost. Most treatments can be carried out in your own home.

Home visits may be made by your own dentist, or can be carried out by the local community dental service. Ask your dentist for advice, or for details of your local community dental service contact NHS Direct on **0845 45 47** (if you are in England or Wales); the NHS helpline on

**0800 224488** (if you are in Scotland); or your local HSS board (if you are in Northern Ireland) – see page 19 for contact details.

## Paying for dental care

Dental treatment is **not** free for everyone, so ask about cost before treatment. Check if you are getting NHS or private treatment – NHS treatment will be cheaper than private dental treatment. To get an idea of current NHS dental charges see the NHS leaflet HC12 ‘Charges and optical voucher values’. You can pick up a copy from your dentist or local social security office. Or, if you are in England, Scotland or Wales, call the Prescription Pricing Authority (PPA) Patient Services on **0845 850 1166**.

For information on NHS and typical private dental charges see the British Dental Health Foundation factsheet ‘Dental Charges’. For a copy call **0845 063 1188** or download it from their website at **[www.dentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.dentalhealth.org.uk)**

## Help with health costs

For over 18’s NHS dental care is free if, when the treatment starts, you are:

- an NHS in-patient and the treatment is carried out by the hospital dentist;
- an NHS hospital dental service out-patient; or
- a community dental service patient.

But, you may be charged for dentures and bridges as a dental service out-patient or a community dental service patient.

NHS dental treatment is also free if, when the treatment starts or when the charge is made, you (or your husband, wife or partner) are getting:

- the guarantee credit part of Pension Credit;
- Income Support; or
- income-based Job Seekers Allowance.

If you are getting Working Tax Credit or Child Tax Credit, then you may be entitled to help with charges for NHS dental treatment. To find out more, ask at your local social security office, or call the PPA Patient Services on **0845 850 1166** (if you are in England, Scotland or Wales).

If you don't get the guarantee credit part of Pension Credit, but are on a low income you may still be able to get help with dental charges. If you are aged 60 or over with savings of less than £12,250 you may get help through the **NHS low income scheme**:

- NHS dental treatment is free if you have a current NHS certificate **HC2** which entitles you to full help with your health charges.
- You may also be able to get some help towards your dental charges if you have NHS certificate **HC3**, which will state the maximum you have to pay.

These certificates are usually valid for periods of 6 to 12 months, depending on your circumstances. To apply for one of these certificates fill in and return form **HC1**, which you can get from your dentist's receptionist or your local social security office.

**If you live in Wales, you are automatically entitled to free dental examinations if you are aged 60 or over on the day you are examined.**

Tell your dentist or their receptionist that you qualify for free treatment **before** you have anything done. You will need to tick a box on a form the dentist gives you stating that you are entitled to free treatment.

For more information on getting help to pay for dental treatment, see the NHS leaflet HC11 'Are you entitled to help with health costs?'. Pick up a copy at your dentist or local social security office. Or, if you are in England, Scotland or Wales, call the PPA Patient Services on **0845 850 1166**. Also see our information sheet no. 9 'Health Benefits'.

## Getting treatment

**Everyone** who is registered for continuing care is entitled to free NHS treatment for the following:

- repairs to dentures
- stopping bleeding after extractions
- recementing a bridge
- calling a dentist out to his or her surgery in an emergency (but you will still have to pay for any treatment you need if you do not usually qualify for free NHS treatment)
- home visits where necessary (but you will have to pay for any treatment you have, unless you are already entitled to free treatment)

Before you have any treatment make sure you are fully informed. Make sure you know:

- the treatment your dentist plans to give you (this may be a course of treatment involving several procedures);
- whether or not you are being treated as an NHS patient (some unessential treatment may not be available on the NHS and you will have to pay for private treatment); and
- how much the treatment is going to cost; (ask your dentist for a written estimate to avoid any misunderstanding).

Remember that you can always refuse any treatment you do not want to have. Your dentist cannot force you to accept treatment. You can stop the treatment if you are not satisfied with it or you don't want to continue with it for any other reason. If you can show that the treatment has been unsatisfactory you will not have to pay for it.

If you are paying for your treatment, dentists can ask for payment before or after you are treated. Check with your dentist what the arrangements are for paying. Almost all NHS treatment is guaranteed for one year and should be replaced free of charge during that time if needed. But check this with your dentist before you have the work done.

Going private

If you are having private dental treatment it might be a good idea to shop around as charges can vary widely between different dentists.

Private dental care is generally more expensive than NHS treatment. You should be able to get all the dental treatment you need to keep your mouth healthy on the NHS. However, most dental practices will offer private treatment. Often they give mixture of NHS and private treatment.

If you are registered for NHS continuing dental care, you can only be given a mixture of NHS and private treatment if you give your dentist your signed agreement.

Information on the cost of private care should be available from your dentist or receptionist. There is no government help towards the cost of private dental treatment. Any help you are entitled to on the NHS does not apply if you have private treatment. If you are considering private dental treatment, always talk to your dentist about your choices and get an estimate of the proposed cost.

The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) produce a leaflet called 'Your guide to private dentistry'. It gives advice on choosing and paying for a private dentist. To get a copy call the OFT on 0800 389 3158. Or contact:

Office of Fair Trading  
PO Box 366  
Hayes UB3 1XB  
Web: [www.oft.gov.uk](http://www.oft.gov.uk)

Private dental cover/budgeting schemes

There are various types of payment plan on offer to cover dental care fees; the most common are explained below. If you are thinking about taking out any budgeting scheme or insurance plan make sure you know exactly how much it will cost and what it will and will not cover.

**Capitation schemes** involve fixed monthly payments based on the amount of treatment your dentist thinks you will need. Once you have registered, you are given an initial health check. The dentist then assesses how much you should pay each month, depending on how much treatment you are likely to need in the future and the level of cover you want. However, more expensive treatment may not be covered by the plan. And you will need to pay for all the initial work that the dentist decides you need (to bring your mouth and teeth 'up to standard') before you can take out a plan. The purpose of most plans is to keep your mouth and teeth healthy, not to repair existing damage.

If you pay into a **cash payment dental cover plan**, you will receive cash payments to go towards your dental care and treatment. You do not usually need to have your teeth checked before you take out this type of dental plan. But the cash you receive will not necessarily cover the cost of all of the treatment you need. This is because the sum paid out is usually fixed at a certain level for each type of treatment.

Some **private medical insurance** covers certain dental surgical treatments. If you have private medical cover, check your insurance documents.

## Dental care for people in care homes

Your care home has a duty to look after your health, welfare and quality of life. This includes arranging access to dental services according to your need. If you live in a care home and are not registered as an NHS patient at a local dental practice, discuss your dental care needs with your care home manager. They should be able to tell you what regular or emergency dental care provision there is for you.

If you permanently live in a care home, you may qualify for help towards dental charges under the NHS low income scheme. You may be entitled if you are on a low income, and if you have less than £20,000 in savings. To apply for help, fill in form HC1(SC) which you can get from your dentist's receptionist or your local social security office. If you are in England, Scotland or Wales you can get the form HC1(SC) from PPA Patient Services on **0845 850 1166**.

## Other primary care services

**Chiropodists** provide foot care - treatment for things like bunions, corns and ingrowing toe nails. You may be entitled to chiropody treatment on the NHS; ask your doctor for details. More information is given in our free advice leaflet 'Fitter Feet'.

**Community psychiatric nurses** provide nursing care at home for people with mental health problems and can provide support for their families.

**Continence advisers** can offer specialist advice and help on incontinence. There is a range of aids and equipment which can make it far easier to cope with incontinence, and with the help of a continence adviser the problem can often be cured altogether. More information is given in our free advice leaflet 'Bladder and Bowel Weakness'.

**Dieticians** offer general advice on healthy eating. They can also give specialist advice to people who have illnesses that are affected by diet, such as irritable bowel syndrome or heart disease.

**District nurses** can provide nursing care at home, for example attending to dressings, caring for pressure sores, giving injections, ear syringing and arranging help with bathing (if there is a medical reason for needing help with bathing).

**Health visitors** can provide general advice on health, for example coping with special diets or preventing constipation.

**NHS Walk-in Centres** have opened in some towns and cities in England. These are for people suffering from minor injuries and illnesses and they can also offer health information and advice. The Walk-in Centres are run by NHS nurses. They are open from early morning to late evening, seven days a week. You don't need to make an appointment to visit a Walk-in Centre. To find out if there is a Walk-in Centre in your area call NHS Direct.

**Occupational therapists** can help older or disabled people cope with everyday activities such as cooking and dressing which may have become difficult. They can assess your need for equipment such as a seat in your bath, special taps which are easier to turn on, cutlery with large handles for arthritic hands and so on. Occupational therapists are also involved in advising on house adaptations to make life easier for disabled or older people. You can usually

contact an occupational therapist through your local authority social services department or your doctor.

**Optometrists** (often called opticians) carry out eye tests to check on the health of your eyes. They also prescribe lenses for glasses or contact lenses. If you are over 60 you can have a free eye test. Some people are also entitled to an NHS voucher to help pay for the cost of glasses and contact lenses. You should be able to get a home visit from an optician if you are housebound and unable to get out. For further information on optometrists see our free advice leaflet 'Better Sight'.

**Palliative care nurses**, such as Macmillan or Marie Curie nurses who specialise in caring for those suffering from cancer, often provide palliative care in the patient's own home.

**Pharmacists** (also known as chemists) can offer you advice on your medication and how it works. They can also offer advice on common complaints such as coughs, colds, aches and pains and other health issues, such as healthy eating. A pharmacist can help you decide if you need to see a doctor. You can just drop into your local pharmacy; you don't need to make an appointment.

**Physiotherapists** can give advice on equipment for daily living and exercises to help stiff joints and muscles. They can also help with conditions such as osteoporosis or asthma.

**Practice nurses** are employed by GP practices and are responsible for nursing care, health promotion and education. You will probably see your practice nurse for injections, including your flu and pneumonia jabs. Practice nurses also run specialist clinics within their GP practice, for example diabetes or asthma clinics. The services that practice nurses provide vary from practice to practice.

**Speech and language therapists** can help if you have difficulties eating and swallowing, for example as a result of a stroke, as well as helping with communication difficulties.

There are also many other community care services and social services to enable people to continue to live independently. For more information on how to get these services see our free advice leaflet 'Help in Your Home'.

## Information and advice

You may need information about local services. For example you may be looking for a GP surgery to register with or you may need to find out about dentists in your area. Or perhaps you need some advice on health issues, but don't think you necessarily need to visit your family doctor. There are different information services that you can contact depending on whether you live in England, Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland.

- **England: NHS Direct** is a confidential health information service, open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. You can contact NHS Direct for information about local health services in your area, for example if you want to find a local dentist or GP surgery. You can also call NHS Direct and speak to a nurse for health advice. Call **0845 4647**.
- NHS Direct provides a confidential translation service. If you want to use a language other than English call 0845 4647 and say the English name of the language you would prefer to use. Wait on the line until you are connected to an interpreter who can help the NHS Direct staff give you the information you need.
- **Wales:** If you are living in Wales, call **NHS Direct Wales** (Galw LECHYD Cymru) on **0845 4647**. You can choose either the Welsh or English language service.
- **Scotland:** Call **NHS 24** on **0845 4 24 24 24**. NHS24 is a similar service to NHS Direct and is available across the whole of Scotland. You can call at any time of day or night for information about local health services or to speak to a nurse for health advice. An interpretation service is available for people whose first language is not English.
- **Northern Ireland:** For information about local health services contact your regional health and social services board (see page 19 for contact details). Unfortunately they cannot give health advice over the phone and they are not open 24 hours a day.

There are also many specialist independent organisations that may be able to offer you information and advice on your health. For example, there are different charities providing advice and information about Alzheimer's disease, arthritis, heart problems, lung problems, cancer, strokes, hearing problems,

diabetes, sight problems and depression. For contact details of the main national organisations see pages 20 to 24 The health information lines listed above should be able to tell you about these and other organisations in your local area. You can also call our free advice line SeniorLine on **0808 800 6565** (or if you are in Northern Ireland call SeniorLine on **0808 808 7575**). SeniorLine advice workers can give you general advice on health services and health benefits. They can also give you information about the different organisations offering more specialist health advice.

Help the Aged and Age Concern both publish a wide variety of advice leaflets and information sheets on health issues, including sight, hearing, incontinence, health benefits, flu and shingles. For further information contact:

- Help the Aged Information Resources Team (address on page 25)
- Age Concern Information Line **0800 00 99 66**, 7am to 7pm daily

## Complaining about the NHS

If you are not happy with the treatment you have received or been refused on the NHS you can make a complaint. Often it is best to try and sort out the problem informally if you can by talking to the staff at the service involved.

But if you do not want to do this or it does not help, you can use the **NHS complaints procedure** to make a formal complaint You can use this procedure to complain about your NHS doctor, nurse, dentist, pharmacist, optician or any other NHS service you are unhappy with. For more information see our information sheet no.27 'How to Make a Complaint'.

## Useful contacts

### Health information

England:

**NHS Direct** - 0845 4647 (textphone: 0845 606 4647)

Web: [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)

Wales:

**NHS Direct Wales** - 0845 4647 (textphone: 0845 606 4647)

Web: [www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk)

Scotland:

**NHS 24** - 0845 4 24 24 24

Web: [www.nhs24.com](http://www.nhs24.com)

Northern Ireland:

**Local health and social services boards:**

**Eastern Health and Social Services Board**

12-22 Linenhall Street

Belfast BT2 8BS

Tel: 028 9032 1313

Textphone: 028 9032 4980

Web: [www.ehssb.n-i.nhs.uk](http://www.ehssb.n-i.nhs.uk)

**Northern Health and Social Services Board**

County Hall, 182 Galgorm Road

Ballymena BT42 1QB

Tel: 028 2531 1000

Helpline: 0845 762 6428

Textphone: 028 2531 1001

Web: [www.nhssb.n-i.nhs.uk](http://www.nhssb.n-i.nhs.uk)

**Southern Health and Social Services Board**

Tower Hill

Armagh BT61 9DR

Tel: 028 3741 0041

Helpline: 0800 66 55 44

Textphone: 028 3741 4530

Web: [www.shssb.org](http://www.shssb.org)

**Western Health and Social Services Board**

15 Gransha Park

Clooney Road

Londonderry BT47 6FN

Tel: 028 7186 0086

Helpline: 0800 58 53 29

Web: [www.whssb.org](http://www.whssb.org)

General information and advice

**Citizens Advice**

For your local Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) look in your phonebook; or visit the national CAB advice website [www.adviceguide.org.uk](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk)

**Patients Association**

PO Box 935

Harrow HA1 3YJ

Helpline: 0845 608 4455 (10am to 4pm, Monday to Friday)

Web: [www.patients-association.org.uk](http://www.patients-association.org.uk)

Voluntary organisations which provide advice and information on health

**Action for Blind People**

14-16 Verney Road

London SE16 3DZ

Helpline: 0800 915 4666

Web: [www.afbp.org](http://www.afbp.org)

Action for Blind People runs a free information and advice service national helpline and can advise on many issues associated with visual impairment.

**Alzheimer's Society**

Gordon House

10 Greencoat Place

London SW1P 1PH

Tel: 0845 300 0336

Web: [www.alzheimers.org.uk](http://www.alzheimers.org.uk)

**Alzheimer's Scotland**

22 Drumsheugh Gardens

Edinburgh EH3 7RN

Tel: 0808 808 3000

Web: [www.alzscot.org.uk](http://www.alzscot.org.uk)

Alzheimer's Society and Alzheimer's Scotland offer advice, information and support to people with dementia, their families and carers through their helpline and local branches.

**Arthritis Care**

18 Stephenson Way  
London NW1 2HD  
Tel: 0808 800 4050  
Web: [www.arthritiscare.org.uk](http://www.arthritiscare.org.uk)

Arthritis Care has over 600 branches around the country. It runs a helpline for people living with arthritis and produces a range of useful leaflets and factsheets.

**British Heart Foundation**

14 Fitzhardinge Street  
London W1H 6DH  
Heart Information Line - 08450 70 80 70  
Web: [www.bhf.org.uk](http://www.bhf.org.uk)

The British Heart Foundation offers advice, information and support through publications, heart health magazine and their Heart Information Line.

**British Lung Foundation**

73-75 Goswell Road  
London EC1V 7ER  
Tel: 020 7688 5555  
Helpline: 08458 50 50 20  
Web: [www.lunguk.org](http://www.lunguk.org)

British Lung foundation produce a range of leaflets, booklets and information sheets on lung health issues. They have a network of local support groups for people affected by lung conditions.

**CancerBACUP**

3 Bath Place  
Rivington Street  
London EC2A 3JR  
Tel: 0808 800 1234  
Web: [www.cancerbacup.org.uk](http://www.cancerbacup.org.uk)

CancerBACUP provides cancer information, practical advice and support for cancer patients, their families and carers.

**Chest, Heart and Stroke Scotland**

65 North Castle Street  
Edinburgh EH2 3LT  
Tel: 0845 077 6000  
Web: [www.chss.org.uk](http://www.chss.org.uk)

Chest, Heart and Stroke Scotland helps people affected by chest, heart and stroke illness through advice and information and support in the community.

**Diabetes UK**

Macleod House  
10 Parkway  
London NW1 7AA  
Careline: 0845 120 2960  
Web: [www.diabetes.org.uk](http://www.diabetes.org.uk)

Diabetes UK run a range of support services including telephone counselling and local support groups. They also produce factsheets and information sheets on diabetes.

**Hearing Concern**

95 Gray's Inn Road  
London WC1X 8TX  
Helpline (tel and text): 0845 0744 600  
Web: [www.hearingconcern.org.uk](http://www.hearingconcern.org.uk)

Hearing Concern provides advice and information to people affected by hearing loss. They have network of local advisers who can do home visits.

**Macmillan Cancer Relief**

89 Albert Embankment  
London SE1 7UQ  
Tel: 0808 808 2020  
Resources line: 01344 350310  
Web: [www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)

Macmillan Cancer Relief offers free publications for people with cancer, their families and friends and provides local care and practical support.

**Mind Info Line**

PO Box 277

Manchester M60 3XN

Tel: 0845 766 0163

Web: [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

Mind Info Line produces booklets and factsheets on a wide range of mental health issues. They can also give details of support services available in your local area.

**Parkinson's Disease Society**

215 Vauxhall Bridge Road

London SW1V 1EJ

Tel: 0808 800 0303

Web: [www.parkinsons.org.uk](http://www.parkinsons.org.uk)

Parkinson's Disease Society has a helpline staffed by nurses, produces information sheets and publications and has a network of local support groups.

**RNIB (Royal National Institute of the Blind)**

105 Judd Street

London WC1H 9NE

Helpline: 0845 766 99 99

Web: [www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)

RNIB provides a range of services, advice and information, including leaflets and publications, many of which are available in large print, Braille and Moon. They can also give details of local sight loss support organisations.

**RNID**

19-23 Featherstone Street

London EC1Y 8SL

Tel: 020 7296 8000

Information Line: 0808 808 0123

Tinnitus helpline: 0808 808 6666

Web: [www.rnid.org.uk](http://www.rnid.org.uk)

RNID provide advice and support for people with hearing loss through their Information Helpline, Tinnitus Helpline and range of factsheets.

**Stroke Association**

Stroke House

240 City Road

London EC1V 2PR

Tel: 0845 30 33 100

Web: [www.stroke.org.uk](http://www.stroke.org.uk)

The Stroke Association provides community support and patient leaflets for people affected by stroke .

For further information contact:

Information Resources Team  
Help the Aged  
207–221 Pentonville Road  
London N1 9UZ  
Tel: 020 7278 1114

If you have access to the Internet you can download our information sheets and advice leaflets by logging on to: [www.helptheaged.org.uk](http://www.helptheaged.org.uk)

**SeniorLine** is the free welfare rights advice and information service run by Help the Aged for older people and their carers. Trained advice workers offer free, confidential and impartial advice about:

- Welfare and disability benefits
- Community and residential care
- Housing options and adaptations
- Access to health and community services
- Equipment to assist independence
- Support for carers
- Agencies offering local practical help

Freephone: **0808 800 6565**

Textphone (Minicom): **0800 26 96 26**

**9am to 4pm, Monday to Friday**

If you are in **Northern Ireland**, contact **Senior Line** on **0808 808 7575**.

IS(N0)30 JC

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Help the Aged is a registered charity No. 272786, registered in England at the above address.