

TOP TIPS: HOW TO GET THE BEST FROM YOUR APPOINTMENT



Make sure you are seeing the right person. Many minor conditions and ailments such as hay fever, dry skin, conjunctivitis, medication queries and sore throats can be dealt with by your Pharmacist. If you can give our reception staff brief details of your problem or request, they are trained to guide you to the correct person. And if you feel you need to speak to someone about an emotional issue, then throughout England and Wales there is a service called IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies), known locally as Talking Change, which is a free talking therapy service. You can self-refer to Talking Change via telephone on 023 9289 2920 or online via www.solent.nhs.uk/talkingchange/.

So if you do decide you need to be seen, how can you get the most out of an appointment?

It is only 10 minutes! Turn up on time. Clinicians run late but if you are late, then your ten-minute time slot is ticking and it may mean a rushed cancelled appointment. The clock starts as soon as your appointment time starts.

Feel free to bring a friend or relative. It can be helpful to have someone with you for support. Patients under the age of 14 should be accompanied by a parent or guardian.

Get it all out at the start. Write down what you want to discuss beforehand. If you have two items to discuss, list them at the beginning rather than saying, 'Ooh, while I'm here...' If you list them at the start, the clinician can plan out the time. Any more than one item may not be dealt with as you only have 10 minutes.

Get to the point. The quicker you mention why you're there, the more time the clinician has to deal with your problem. This can be quite difficult with emotional problems, as some people find it hard to open up, but as for the rest, it's best to get on with it. The clinician will tease out what he or she needs from you in terms of more information.

Bring your diary. First, you can jot down notes as an *aide-memoire*. Second, if you can tell us exactly what happened and when, that makes our job much easier. Do tell the clinician what you have tried, e.g. 'I took paracetamol and it didn't help...' Certain words to describe your symptoms may help us identify the problem more quickly. Is your pain dull or sharp? Does it burn or throb? What are you unable to do compared to when you are well?

Be prepared to be examined. Please wear clothing that is easy to remove.

Ask questions. If you don't understand something, please don't be afraid to ask the doctor.

Make use of the primary care team. The GP is only a cog in the large well-oiled machine that is a GP surgery. You'll save him/her and yourself a lot of time if you pick the right part of that machine. Chasing a hospital referral or hospital test results? Ring the hospital department. Need a blood pressure

check? Pop in and use our waiting room machine. Many services do not need you to see the GP.

Don't expect us to solve everything in one visit. We live in a convenience culture, but medicine can be a complex business. Occasionally, you will need to wait for referrals to a specialist or try a treatment to see how you get on. It is unlikely a list of problems can be dealt with in one appointment so be prepared to prioritise if this is the case.

Don't assume you can have what you want. NHS general practice was set up to deal with people's health care needs. The rise of consumerism, medical advances and private clinics have meant that patients ask for some tests or procedures that aren't clinically necessary or that there isn't enough evidence to support with taxpayers' money.

Don't trust everything 'Dr Google' says. We understand if you're worried you will do some research and please do say if you are concerned of a specific illness, but please let us discuss things with you and come up with a plan.

Don't think that seeing patients is all a GP does. You may find your GP often runs late. This may be because he/she is on the phone to another doctor, admitting someone to hospital, or getting constant interruptions — home visit requests, urgent messages, safeguarding issues, calls from the hospital or coroner, queries from a pharmacist, urgent letters and results. Surveys indicate that GPs and patients would like longer appointments, but until the national shortage of GPs is addressed this will be difficult to achieve.

Finally, *please don't ask us about your teeth* — we didn't go to dental school...