

Getting the most out of your appointment

Helping patients to prepare

Acknowledgments

The Patients Association would like to sincerely thank the 10 patients who gave us their time, expertise, and experience that led to the production of this guide.

Who is the guide for?

Before, during and after appointments, the guide is to help you, the patient:

- ensure you are prepared,
- prevent things going wrong,
- steps you can take at each stage of your journey through the health and care system.

What is the aim of the guide?

To provide you with the knowledge and tools you need so that you are prepared to get the most out of your care.

Are there any other useful resources?

Alongside the guide, there is a short animation setting out the key steps to prepare you to make the most of the care you receive from the health and care system. The animation will also help you to use the guide if you prefer pictures rather than words.

We want the guide and animation to give you information that is easy to understand, and that will have a positive impact on both you and the health and care system.

The things that can help you be prepared and receive the best care and treatment for your condition, before, during and after your appointment.



Before your appointment

Communication

- You can ask for the hospital or surgery to contact you in a way that is easier for you to understand. For example, if English is not your first language or you have a disability, you can ask for letters to be written in a way that is clear to you. You may also want to be contacted by text or email instead of by letter
- You may need someone to interpret for you in another language. If you are Deaf or hard of hearing, you may need someone to interpret in British Sign Language. Check if the healthcare provider can provide access to an interpretation service during your appointment
- Have your cultural, language and other needs been acknowledged? You may want to be seen by a woman healthcare worker or need an interpreter, for example
- Do you understand the information that you have received? If not, you can ask for it to be sent in a different format or language. For example, a document with larger letters, fewer words and more icons or pictures
- Write down the name of the healthcare professional you will see and what you want to ask them about your condition or treatment
- You may want to arrange for someone to come with you to offer support or ask questions on your behalf
- You may want to write down your questions in advance of your appointment and take them with you to your appointment

- It may be useful to bring a list of your current medication with you to avoid any doubt.

Sharing information

- You may have already taken blood tests or other checks with a different department. Making the team aware of this, could prevent you taking the same tests again
- You may have a chronic illness that could affect your current condition. If you are being treated for this illness by a different hospital, it may be a good idea to write down the name of the hospital or department and the name of the illness you have, so that you can tell healthcare professionals
- Do you know why you have been referred to this appointment for your condition? If not, you may need to ask your GP, consultant or the person who referred you for more information.

Accessibility

- If you have a physical disability or find it difficult to move, it is important to check if the location of your appointment is accessible to you. For example, if you can't use stairs, it will be a good idea to check which floor your consultation is on and whether there is a working lift
- If you have to arrange transport to take you to your appointment, it is important to book it before your appointment date to make sure it is confirmed. You will then feel confident that you will be able to get there



- If you are worried about paying for travel to your appointment, the Healthcare Travel Costs Scheme will help you to claim a refund for travel costs. You can find out more information about the scheme at www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/help-with-health-costs/healthcare-travel-costs-scheme-htcs
- If you have taken transport to your appointment, ask the driver to drop you off at a point that is safe and easy for you to get into the building.

Consent

- Does the information sent to you about your appointment include treatment you are not comfortable with? For example, you may prefer a test to be done under general and not local anesthetic
- You may not want some of your personal information to be shared in public documents. Tell the healthcare professional about this and they may ask for your consent in future
- If you are not sure about what will happen during an emergency, for example, regarding Do Not Resuscitate, you may want to ask for more details during the appointment
- Have you signed the correct consent forms for your care and treatment? If you are not sure, contact the department or team responsible for your care for more information about this.

During your appointment

Communication

- Check to see how much time you have for the appointment
- You can ask if it's ok to discuss more than one condition

- Don't be afraid to make notes about what you discuss with the healthcare professional, what will happen next and how you will be informed
- Do you have a Personalised Care Plan? You can find out more at <https://www.england.nhs.uk/personalisedcare/pcsp/>. Ask the healthcare professional if you are not sure. A plan means you have more choice over the way care is delivered
- If you have someone with you for support, make sure they are equally included in the discussion and check with you that you are happy with decisions made about your treatment and care.

Sharing information

- Is the information that the healthcare professional has about you and your condition, correct? Make sure you tell them about any mistakes because it could have an impact on your care in future
- If you are being treated by different health teams and disciplines, do ask how they will work together to treat your condition, and how you can help to make the process easier
- You may want to ask if your GP will be given updates on your treatment.



Accessibility

- Explain to the healthcare professional the best way for them to communicate with you during the appointment. For example, you can ask them to look at you directly so that you can lip-read. You may want the person supporting you to ask this on your behalf
- Before the end of the appointment, ask the healthcare professional to go over what will happen next with your condition or treatment. Ask them to write down any names or terms that are new to you. It could help you to manage your care in the future.

Consent

- You can ask the healthcare professional about being part of all decisions made about your treatment and care. This is called shared decision-making and will help you to feel confident that you are receiving the care and treatment you want and need
- You may ask to see your hospital records and other information held about you to make sure they are correct, and you have given your permission for them to be shared
- Check the details about your next of kin is correct. If not, provide updated information.

After your appointment

Communication

- Look through your notes. If there are things that you don't understand you can contact the surgery, clinic or hospital to help make them clearer

- If you forgot to ask an important question about your condition or treatment during the appointment, then contact the department or health team. You should have their contact details from the information they sent you before your appointment. You can also contact a charity who may give you additional advice
- Make a note of the date of your next appointment and the things you may need to do to prepare for it. For example, you may have to take a course of medication. If it is in a different location, you could have to plan your journey, such as booking transport.

Sharing Information

- Pass on any relevant information to other people who support you. For example, you may be receiving support from a carer or friend who will be able to assist you better with this information
- Did you feel seen, heard and understood? If not, you could take someone with you to the next appointment who will support you to express how important this is.

Accessibility

- Were you able to understand more about your condition, and the reasons for your treatment and future care? If you are not clear because you didn't have enough support, you can contact the department or team to explain what you need. For example, you may need an interpreter who speaks in a dialect of your language
- Find out when you will receive a refund for your travel costs and how you will be paid. The Healthcare Travel Costs Scheme will give you more advice about how to do this. The information will help you to plan for travel to appointments in future.



Consent

- Think about what happened during your appointment. Are you happy with the decisions made and do you agree with following the treatment and care plan?
 - You may have some questions or concerns about parts of your treatment and care. For example, you may not be comfortable with changing medication or increasing the number of tablets you take. Discussing this with your healthcare professional is important because together you may be able to find a solution that you are both happy with
- If you live with one or more long-term conditions and have a Personalised Care Plan, you can discuss the progress of your treatment and care regularly with your healthcare team to make sure that it reflects your wishes and what you want.

Conclusion

When you fall ill or something about your health is worrying you, this can make you feel anxious or vulnerable. These feelings might increase if you are not sure how to approach your treatment and care with healthcare professionals. Remember to reach out to friends or family if you can. Based on discussions with patients, we know that being prepared at every stage of your health journey is a crucial part of getting the most out of your care. We hope that this guide gives you some of the information you need to prepare for your care and treatment before, during and after your healthcare appointments.

The Patients Association

The Patients Association is an independent patient charity campaigning for improvements in health and social care for patients.

Uniquely for a charity with a remit covering all health and care issues, we work with patients directly: they are our members and supporters, and the people who benefit from our help and information services. Through our helpline we provide information to thousands of people each year about the health and social care system.

Our purpose is to ensure that everybody can access and benefit from the health and care they need to live well, by ensuring that services are designed and delivered through equal partnership with patients.

Membership of the Patients Association is open to anyone interested in health and social care. If that's you, we'd love you to be a part of our growing community - **Join us today**.

Our helpline is free and available to anyone with a question about their care or that of a loved one. You can contact our helpline advisers by email or phone (details below).

Contact Us

For any enquiries regarding this guide or any other report, please contact mailbox@patients-association.org.uk.

Website: www.patients-association.org.uk

General enquiries: 020 8423 9111

Helpline: 0800 345 7115 / helpline@patients-association.org.uk

Twitter: [@PatientsAssoc](https://twitter.com/PatientsAssoc)

Facebook: [Patients Association](https://www.facebook.com/PatientsAssociation)

Bluesky: [@patientsassoc.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/patientsassoc.bsky.social)

The Patients Association is a registered charity in England and Wales (1006733).

A company limited by guarantee. Registered company in England and Wales

(02620761). Contact us at The Patients Association, PO Box 935, Harrow, Middlesex, HA1 3YJ.

