

# Getting the Most from Your Appointment

As patients we get only a limited amount of time when we see a doctor or nurse. Over the following pages we give some hints and tips to enable you to make best use of your appointment.



## Prepare for Your Appointment

- ▶ **Decide the most important thing affecting you** right now. Share this right at the beginning so the GP can focus the consultation.
- ▶ Think about what you want from your doctor and **be clear in your own mind what you want to say**.
- ▶ **Make a note of your symptoms**, worries, things you want to discuss **and questions you would like to ask**. Write down your two or three most important questions.
- ▶ **Make a note of all your medicines**: prescribed, over-the-counter, alternative medicines, and any supplements.
- ▶ **Take all these notes with you** to the appointment.



## Going to Your Appointment

- ▶ If you need support, **take a relative, carer or friend**.
- ▶ Please **tell staff at Reception if you have any communication needs** they can help with. Ask in advance for an interpreter or communication support if you need them.
- ▶ **If you have to change or cancel an appointment, tell the practice** as soon as you can.
- ▶ **Be on time**: if you arrive 10 minutes late, you've missed your appointment.
- ▶ **Wear clothes that make examination easier** and which you can take off and put on quickly.
- ▶ You might be anxious and stressed, but **try to keep calm**.
- ▶ Please **be patient if your appointment is delayed**. Remember delays are often caused by patients needing emergency treatment.

## Your Symptoms

- ▶ **What are your symptoms?** Write them down. Aches and pains may be obvious but think also about any changes you've noticed.
- ▶ **Do your symptoms follow a pattern?** Try to monitor how you feel over 24 hours.
- ▶ **When did the symptoms begin?**
- ▶ **Are the symptoms making everyday life more difficult?**
- ▶ **What are you most concerned about?**
- ▶ **Is there a family history which might be relevant?**

## At Your Appointment

- ▶ **Discuss important things first**; don't leave your main problem until the end.
- ▶ **Include a summary of why you're there** in your first sentence.
- ▶ **Be realistic**: asking about several ailments means you're likely to need more than one appointment.
- ▶ Do **say if big life events may be affecting your health**.
- ▶ **Stick to the point**.
- ▶ **Be open, honest and confident**.
- ▶ **Ask questions** (see below).
- ▶ **If you don't understand anything, ask**; your GP will not mind explaining again.
- ▶ It's OK for you (and anyone accompanying you) to **take notes**.



## Afterwards

- ▶ **Take any prescribed medication**, or other treatment, as directed.
- ▶ **If you can't stick with the plan/medication go back** and explain why to your doctor; there may be an alternative.
- ▶ **Request repeat prescriptions in plenty of time** so you don't risk running out of medicine.
- ▶ **Don't be upset if there is a query over your repeat medication**; this might mean the GP is taking extra trouble to check your combination of medicines is safe and won't harm you.

## Questions to Ask

- ▶ What are the **possible side effects of any medication**?
- ▶ **Why do I need this test?** How and **when will I get the results?**
- ▶ Is there **anything I should look out for**, and what should I do if it happens?
- ▶ **Ask about anything which is unclear**.
- ▶ If you may have a long-term condition, **ask if there's a support group**.

## The Role of Reception

See overleaf ➡➡



## The Role of Reception

- ▶ Your doctor has entrusted their reception staff with an important job: to deal with enquiries, book appointments and try to keep everything running smoothly.
- ▶ Receptionists will have a really good understanding of the services on offer so ...
- ▶ ... think of receptionists as your ally in finding the person most skilled to help you ...
- ▶ ... but to do so they may need further details about your condition to help assess the degree of urgency.
- ▶ Be realistic. Is your issue actually urgent? Do you really need to see a specific GP? (Maybe you do if you have unresolved problems or need continuity of care for multiple chronic illnesses.) Could the practice nurse or clinical pharmacist deal with your problem?
- ▶ If you have multiple problems to discuss, ask if you can book a double appointment.
- ▶ The receptionists' job can be stressful. They will do their best to help you at all times, so please try to be patient and courteous in return.



If you no longer need  
your appointment ...  
or you can't get to your  
appointment ...

**please tell us ...**

so we can offer the time  
to another patient



This patient leaflet has been written and produced by [Barnabas Patient Voices](#), the patient group of Barnabas Medical Centre, Northolt, Middlesex.

Email: [barnabas.ppg@gmail.com](mailto:barnabas.ppg@gmail.com)

© [Barnabas Patient Voices](#), 2025