

REGISTERING WITH A GENERAL PRACTITIONER

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are registered with a GP to allow you to access suitable medical help.

Everyone living in the UK has a right to register with a GP. This right is based on residency and not nationality or payment of taxes. You can choose your GP, providing their list is not full and they agree to accept you.

GP Practices operate on a geographical basis. You are normally accepted if you live close by, as this will allow a GP to visit you at home in an emergency. In some areas there may be a stricter catchment area system, which includes designate streets only.

To identify practices in your area, contact NHS Direct – the confidential, 24-hour advice and health information service. Call them on local rate number 0845 46 47.

The list they send may include practice details such as the number of GP's, and whether male and female GP's are available.

Details on local GP's and Dentists are also available on the NHS website www.nhs.uk by entering your town or postcode.

If there are several practices in your area, ring and ask if they are accepting new patients. There are a maximum number of patients allowed on each practice list. If a practice is enrolling new patients, call in to collect a copy of the practice leaflet. This will name the GP's, indicate surgery hours, indicate whether an appointment system operates, explain arrangements for getting advice over the phone, for collecting repeat prescriptions, for out of hours provision and requesting home visits. It could also include details on special clinics offered for those with chronic conditions such as diabetes. It may also be possible to see complimentary therapists such as Osteopaths through the practice.

A visit to the practice will allow you to see the facilities and discover how easy it is to park nearby or get there by public transport. You can also discuss any specific needs you may have. These may include wheelchair access to consulting rooms or availability of a GP who speaks your language, if English is not your language of choice.

Before being accepted as a new patient or as part of the registration process, you will be offered a basic health check, usually with the practice nurse.

If you have difficulty finding a practice to accept you, contact NHS Direct. There is a responsibility to assign you to a GP if you are unable to find one yourself. NHS Direct will explain the process.

Making an Appointment

Most practices operate an appointment system. If the GP of your choice is free, you can make an appointment with them. There is usually a system to allow you to see a GP in an emergency if there are no free appointments. In many practices it is possible to speak to a GP or practice nurse on the phone if you call at an agreed time.

Home Visits

Most GPs will make home visits but only to patients they feel are too ill to visit the surgery. Give a full description of your condition when you phone the surgery. This will allow an informed decision to be made on whether a home visit is necessary. If possible call the practice in the morning to allow for a visit the same day.

Out-of-hours services

Many practices use a designated out-of-hours service or work with a local GP co-operative to manage their out-of-hours provision. Calling the practice number will usually put you in touch with the appropriate service. Check the practice leaflet for details.

If you cannot find your practice number, call NHS Direct. They will be able to refer you to your GPs out-of-hours service.

Changing your GP

If you are moving from the area or have found another local GP who you would prefer to be registered with, you do not need to inform your current GP that you wish to change.

Once a new GP has agreed to accept you, the practice will contact your previous GP for your medical records.

GP services when away from home or on holiday

If you know you will be living away from your usual home for up to 3 months, you may apply to a local practice to be accepted as a 'temporary resident'. If this list is not full, they will most likely accept you.

If you become ill on holiday, you should ask the hotel reception if they have arrangements with a local practice. If staying with friends, you could approach their practice to see if they are willing to treat you. You could also contact NHS direct. They will be able to discuss the options available locally.