

HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF A VISIT TO YOUR DOCTOR

Sometimes a visit to your doctor can leave you feeling confused or frustrated. Perhaps you couldn't explain how you were feeling, or maybe you felt that your doctor didn't have time to listen to you properly. If you were feeling unwell you may not have taken in everything that was said or be able to remember it afterwards. It can help to know that you are not alone!

This factsheet offers tips and advice to help you get the most out of a visit to your doctor. Hopefully you will soon be able to feel more in control of what is happening to you and have greater confidence about managing your chest, heart or stroke condition.

Does it have to be the doctor?

If you have a chest, heart or stroke condition it is likely that you have to visit your doctor (your GP or your specialist doctor / consultant) from time to time. These visits can be routine appointments, as part of your ongoing care, or urgent appointments if you are unwell. Nowadays there are a wide range of health professionals who are able to offer health advice / information so it can be helpful to know who to contact.

If you are not feeling well and you need medical advice you can:

- Contact your GP surgery (within working hours). The receptionist may ask you a few questions about how you are feeling – this helps them work out if you need to see a doctor or if the practice nurse can help you. Practice nurses can often have a chat with you about many of the issues that might be worrying you (e.g. your prescribed drugs, lifestyle changes or help you need at home). Some surgeries offer telephone consultations with a GP so ask the receptionist if you think this would be helpful.
- Contact your local chemist (within working hours). The pharmacist can offer advice about your symptoms and advise you whether you need to see a doctor. They will also have information about over-the-counter remedies.
- Contact your specialist doctor / consultant directly (within working hours) if this has been previously agreed. This would normally be through his / her secretary.



- Phone NHS 24 outside working hours (08454 242424). This service is specifically designed to help you to get the “right care from the right person at the right time”. Your call will initially be taken by a call handler who is trained to direct the calls to the correct person. Try to be patient: sometimes it can feel that you are repeating yourself several times before you speak to a doctor or nurse. NHS 24 can arrange out-of-hours appointments with a doctor (usually at a local health centre or hospital) if needed.

Remember it is often possible to get a repeat prescription without seeing a doctor. Most surgeries (and some local chemists) have a system for ordering / picking up repeat prescriptions.

Before you go

If you have an appointment arranged it can be helpful to work out what you want to discuss with your doctor before you go. Decide what you want to get out of the visit: is it advice, different drugs or a referral for other therapy (e.g. physiotherapy)?

Before your visit, think through all the information you believe your doctor needs to know – when did your symptoms start, how have they changed, how is your life affected and, most importantly, how you actually feel. It can often be useful to make a list of the key points you want to talk about. Remember that most appointments are for less than 10 minutes. Book a double appointment if you have a lot to talk about, however your doctor is a busy person and realistically will not be able to deal with a long list of problems in one visit.

Consider taking a relative or friend with you, particularly if you are feeling unwell or anxious. Between you it is more likely that you will remember all that was talked about.

Arrive on time for your appointment, but be prepared to wait if your doctor is running late. Take a book or newspaper with you and try not to get frustrated.

Let the receptionist / secretary know if you are unable to make your appointment.



During the consultation

Try to relax. Listen to what your doctor is saying. If you don't understand, or if you feel that your doctor has not answered your questions, ask for further information.

Note down any important points or ask your relative / friend to do this. Check your list at the end of the appointment to make sure that you have covered all the points you wanted to.

Don't be afraid to say how you really feel – after all, you are the only person who knows.

After you leave

Think about what you have talked about with your doctor. Is there anything you need to do now? (E.g. book another appointment, get a prescription.) Do you feel satisfied with the information you were given? If you have any more questions remember that you can phone the confidential CHSS Advice Line on 0845 077 6000.

Further information on chest, heart and stroke conditions can be found on the following websites:

- www.chss.org.uk
- www.nhsinform.co.uk (NHS Scotland information service)

**Being prepared for a visit to the doctor is really helpful.
So here are some tips to help you get the best from your visit.**

1. Think about how you are feeling. Can you describe your symptoms? Do you know when they started? Have your symptoms changed at all?
2. Make a list of the things you want to talk about / questions you want to ask.
3. You don't need to go alone – take a relative or friend with you if you want.
4. Ask your doctor to clarify any points that you don't understand.
5. Remember you are the only person that knows how you are feeling! If you think that your doctor hasn't answered your questions, ask for further information.
6. Try to relax – your doctor is there to help you!

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If you would like to speak to one of our nurses in confidence,
please call the Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland Advice Line

Monday - Friday 9.30am - 4.00pm

0845 077 6000