

# Your local GP practice

A practical guide to getting the  
most out of your healthcare at  
the doctors



# Contents

Introduction	<b>Page 3</b>
What happens when you contact your GP practice?	<b>Page 4</b>
What does a GP do?	<b>Page 5</b>
Who are the people who work at my practice?	<b>Page 6</b>
Prescriptions	<b>Page 7</b>
How can I make an appointment?	<b>Page 9</b>
Managing your health digitally	<b>Page 12</b>
Your questions answered	<b>Page 13</b>
How to get the most out of your appointment	<b>Page 19</b>
Checklist of questions to ask at your appointment	<b>Page 20</b>
Carers	<b>Page 21</b>
People with a learning disability and/or autism	<b>Page 22</b>
Communication	<b>Page 23</b>
Accessibility	<b>Page 24</b>
Having equal access – Reasonable adjustments	<b>Page 25</b>
How to request reasonable adjustments	<b>Page 26</b>
Your rights	<b>Page 27</b>
How your local Healthwatch can help you	<b>Page 28</b>
Tell your GP your views	<b>Page 29</b>
How to get help with making a complaint	<b>Page 30</b>
How to discuss an issue with your GP practice	<b>Page 31</b>
Another way you can make a complaint	<b>Page 32</b>

If you require this document in an alternative format, please get in touch with Healthwatch North Yorkshire using the details on page 28.

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# Introduction

**Healthwatch North Yorkshire is an independent voice for the people. We are here to listen to experiences and give people the opportunity to influence how local health and social care services are provided.**

The way we access our local GP service is changing. This guide aims to help you understand the new ways that you can receive care from your local GP surgery. For example:

- When to make a GP practice appointment.
- How to make your appointment.
- The different ways to access your GP practice.



# What happens when you contact your GP practice?

**GP practices manage many patient requests daily. Each request needs careful thought to decide the next steps. Practices must figure out why patients need help and where to send them.**

This is called '**triage**'. Triage means understanding the type of support needed and who should provide it. It also considers how urgently patients need help. Clinical triage helps match patients to the best care and healthcare professional based on their needs.

All requests are reviewed before deciding the best care. Some practices use phone or video calls first and see or consult with patients in person later if needed.

The GP contract requires practices to offer **online consultation** and **secure messaging tools**. There are a few different online consultation systems that are used by GP practices in North Yorkshire such as eConsult, SystemOnline and AccuRx. SystemOnline does the same thing as the NHS app.

But this doesn't mean that a GP practice won't help you in-person. GP practices remain accessible to people's needs and communicate in a way that people understand.

# What does a GP do?

**Your General Practitioner (GP) can give you medical advice, treatment and prescribe medication.**

Your GP can also refer you to **other healthcare professionals** to diagnose or treat specific aspects of your condition. For example, they may refer you to a chiroprapist, for a hearing test, or to your local falls prevention service. These other health professionals may visit you at home or hold clinics at a local practice, health centre or hospital.

Your GP practice must allocate everyone a named, accountable GP. This GP will oversee your care and take responsibility for evaluating your current physical and psychological needs. Though this doesn't mean the named GP is the only doctor at your practice who will or can provide care for you.



# Who are the people who work at my GP practice?

**GP practice services have changed to meet increasing demand and respond to local healthcare needs. They have done this by expanding the workforce, to include more specialist roles that work alongside GPs and improve their offering to patients.**

You may be seen at your GP practice by someone other than a doctor. Each member of staff at your GP practice is a highly trained expert in their field. They are there to help you get the best care as quickly as possible.

Groups of GP practices decide what additional staff roles will benefit their patients. These staff members are often shared between GP practices. This means there will be more **choice of health care professionals** that you can access.

One of the concerns from patients about seeing non-GP roles is that they won't be able to get medical medications or sick notes. Other healthcare professionals can help you. For example, nurse practitioners.

Receptionists (also known as care navigators) can also help with your health care journey. They can help you see the right person at the right time, who not be a GP, might be things you can do to help yourself (self-care) or a referral to a pharmacist.



# Prescriptions



## What we hear from people

“What is the best way to order a repeat prescription?”

Repeat prescriptions can be ordered via the **NHS app**, your **patient online account** or **your GP practice website**.

### Can someone else request them?

Yes. You can allow family or trusted friends to ensure a safe method of ordering medication is used – for example, online ordering, where patients themselves feel they are unable to use digital methods. You must let a healthcare professional know. You can't just send a friend to a pharmacist without first speaking to the pharmacy.

### If you can't access the internet

If you do not have access to the internet then some practices have dedicated prescription telephone lines. Many practices also have a prescription request box in their reception areas.

### When to request a repeat prescription?

It is important that you order your medication at least a week or two before you need it. This will allow time for your GP practice to process your request as well as time for the pharmacy to order your medication if required. It ensures that you get your medication when you need it, so you do not run out. You do not normally need an appointment unless advised otherwise.

# Prescriptions



## What we hear from people

“How do I get the medication or medical aids I need with an NHS prescription?”

Prescriptions are sent electronically from your GP practice to a community pharmacy. To nominate a specific pharmacy, speak with your GP practice or select it on the NHS app.

Repeat prescriptions are reviewed regularly, and your GP practice will discuss any changes with you. For queries about your prescriptions, contact your GP practice as community pharmacies cannot make changes.

**Pharmacists are able to provide medication for certain conditions. You can find out about medication here on the [NHS England » Pharmacy First website](#).**

You can speak to community pharmacies for information about their specific treatments and services, as these can vary.

Community pharmacies can supply most medications in an emergency outside of GP practice hours and can prescribe antibiotics. Some medications or alternatives may be cheaper over the counter, so discuss this at your pharmacy.



# How can I make an appointment?



## By phone

Some people prefer to contact their GP practice by telephone. Phone lines can be extremely busy, particularly at 8am.

When you call your GP practice, you will usually have to wait in a queue to book an appointment.

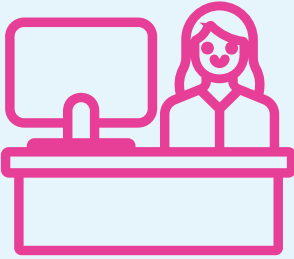
Your GP practice may have set times when you can request to get an on the day appointment. Practices offer appointments on a need basis not just because a patient wants one on the day.

The staff who answer the calls at your GP practice are trained to ask questions which will help them work out the most appropriate way to help you.

Some practices will offer an initial telephone appointment where a healthcare professional will either be able to provide you with advice or organise treatment. They may also book you a face-to-face appointment.

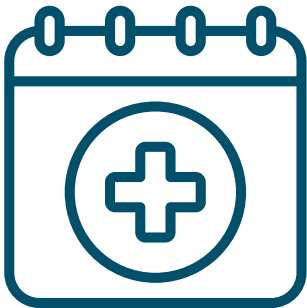
If you don't need an urgent appointment, it might be better to call later in the day when phone lines may be less busy. Some GP practices will send a text message to confirm your appointment.

# How can I make an appointment?



## At the reception desk

You can go to your GP practice and speak to the reception staff who will be able to help with your query. Reception staff are trained to ask certain questions, to help you get seen by the right or most appropriate professional.



**Nationally, more than 15 million GP appointments are wasted each year because patients don't show up or don't let the surgery know they don't need the appointment.**

This is equivalent to: The annual salary of 2,325 full-time GPs, 224,640 cataract operations, 58,320 hip replacement operations, and 216,000 drug treatment courses for Alzheimer's.

## Help reduce the number of wasted appointments

The NHS asks you to:

- Cancel appointments you no longer need
- Let the surgery know if you can't make an appointment

The NHS also uses text reminders to help people manage their appointments. You can reply to the text message to cancel or rearrange their appointment.

# How can I make an appointment?



**Every GP practice offers online access, though each may use a different app or GP website.**

These online systems let you request, book, cancel, and view appointments. They can be convenient and a good way to access healthcare when the phone lines are busy.

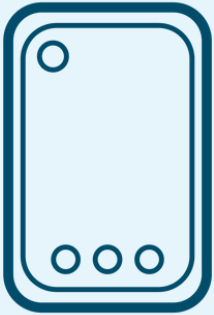
These will be reviewed by a clinician and in most cases you will be offered a link to book an appointment or speak to a receptionist to book an appointment.

Keep in mind that online appointments are usually for non-urgent needs.

Appointments online (known as e-consultations) are the most convenient way to request routine or non-urgent appointments, allowing you to provide information and in some cases upload appointments.

To access healthcare services online with your GP, you'll need a computer, tablet, or smartphone. Some services require an NHS login; you can learn how to set one up on the NHS 'About login' website.

# Managing your health digitally



## NHS app

**The NHS app can be accessed on your smart phone or tablet. You do not need to request an account through your GP practice.**

You can download the app on your phone or tablet using the Apple App Store or Google Play.

The NHS app gives a patient access to their medical records, allows them to manage appointments and medications and provides information and advice.



## SystemConnect and Airmid

**SystemConnect and Airmid allow patients to access their healthcare records and manage medications if their GP practice uses SystemOne.**

If your GP practice uses SystemConnect, you will need to tell the practice reception team that you would like to use it. The practice will then generate a username and password for you to log in.

# Your questions answered



## What we hear from people

“Why should I tell the receptionist what my problem is?”

Reception staff have access to a range of healthcare professionals and services as GP practices now have more roles working in practices that can help patients.

The information you provide will be treated professionally and confidentially to help the practice team book the best appointment for you, with the most appropriate healthcare professional, as this isn't always the GP.

You can help by providing as much information as you can whether this is over the phone or using an on-line service.

**All practice staff are bound by rules of confidentiality**



# Your questions answered



## What we hear from people

“How long will I wait for an appointment at the GP practice?”

If your need is urgent, most practices will provide 'same day' appointments. If an urgent appointment can't be provided you may be recommended to **call 111**, go to an **urgent care/treatment centre** or **accident & emergency**.

If your need isn't urgent, you will be offered an appointment at another time. This is sometimes referred to as a pre bookable or routine appointment.

It is important to remember that general practice is not an emergency service.

In an emergency you should **call 999**.



# Your questions answered



## What we hear from people

“If I’m not sure I need an appointment, what else could I do?”

Your local pharmacy can help with many health problems such as sore throats, coughs, colds, urinary tract infections and routine aches and pains. You can visit them directly or ask for advice over the phone.

If you are unsure about what you might need, your practice team can help direct you. They will tell you if you need to speak to a doctor or another health practitioner or help you find out if your need could be more urgent.

You could also consider viewing **NHS 111** online or use the online service on your practice's website for more self-help guidance.



# Your questions answered



## What we hear from people

“Why, when I get through to the practice are there no appointments left?”

GP practices can only safely provide a certain number of appointments per day depending on the staff they have available. Each practice will decide how those appointments are given throughout the day to ensure there is a mix of same day and pre-bookable appointments.

The NHS has made some recent changes to increase the number of appointments available to include **weekday evenings and Saturday appointments**, which will help alleviate this issue. Your GP practice will offer this service but the appointment may not be at your surgery, you may need to travel to another practice in the local area. The clinician providing your appointment will have access to your medical record.





# Your questions answered



## What we hear from people

"I'm too ill to visit my GP practice - what can I do?"

If you can't visit your GP surgery for medical reasons, you can ask your GP to make a home visit. If possible, try to call your GP in the morning if you think you'll need a visit the same day. Your GP surgery should have accessible information explaining how to request a home visit.

If you need to see your GP but can't make it into the surgery, they must offer a home visit instead. They should factor in how urgent your condition is when arranging a home visit. Your GP might also be able to give you advice through a telephone or video consultation as an alternative.



# Your questions answered



## What we hear from people

“Why is my appointment not face-to-face?”

All practices will give you a face-to-face appointment when your health condition needs assessing and where one is available. You may initially be offered a telephone or video appointment because it may be the quickest way to get you the care you need. If you prefer face-to-face, please tell the practice team of your preference, especially if this reduces barriers to effective communication, for example, if you have hearing difficulties.



## What we hear from people

“I no longer need my appointment - what should I do?”

If you cannot make your appointment or no longer need it, please contact the practice to cancel it as soon as you can. Many practices have the ability for patients to cancel appointments via text message or via the surgery online system. Appointments that are cancelled are offered to someone else who needs it rather than the appointment being wasted.

# How to get the most out of your appointment

**GP appointments are often just 10 minutes long, so it's essential to make the most of your time. Be prepared to explain your symptoms, discuss a diagnosis and treatment plan, and ask any questions.**

## **Tips for before your appointment**

- Write down your symptoms, noting when they started and any triggers.
- List important questions to ask.

During your appointment:

- Start with your most pressing issue.
- Ask for clarification if needed.
- Take notes or bring someone to help you remember details.

Before leaving, confirm you understand the next steps.



# Checklist of questions to ask at your appointment



## **Tests, such as blood tests or scans**

- What are the tests for?
- How and when will I get the results?
- Who do I contact if I do not get the results?

## **Treatment**

- Are there other ways to treat my condition?
- What do you recommend?
- Are there any side effects or risks? If so, what are they?
- How long will I need treatment for?
- How will I know if the treatment is working?
- How effective is this treatment?
- What will happen if I do not have any treatment?
- Is there anything I should stop or avoid doing?
- Is there anything I can do to help myself?

## **What next**

- What happens next?
- Do I need to come back and see you? If so, when?
- Who do I contact if things get worse?
- Do you have any written information?
- Where can I go for more information?
- Is there a support group or any other source of help?

# Carers



## What we hear from people

“I can’t register as a carer at my practice because the person I care for doesn’t go to the same doctor.”

**The person you care for doesn’t need to be a patient at the same GP practice for you to register as a carer at your own.**

All GP practices hold a **carers register** for unpaid carers and are encouraged to become carer-friendly by:

- Using NHS carers quality markers to improve services.
- Personalising services by considering individual needs using carers’ passports.
- Actively seeking hidden carers.
- Undergoing training and appointing carer ambassadors.

Some practices have carer noticeboards, hold events, and offer specified carer appointments.

If you provide unpaid care for someone, even a family member, register yourself as a carer at your GP practice.

Consider if the person you care for needs you involved in their care and health decisions. If so, you need their formal consent to access their health records. Practice staff cannot share confidential information without this consent.

Registering as a carer ensures you receive appropriate services, like flu vaccines. You may also consider applying for Lasting Power of Attorney for health and care.

# People with a learning disability and/or autism



## What we hear from people

“What are my options – or someone I care for – when it comes to a learning disability and/or autism?”

GP Practices offer **annual health checks** to all patients aged 14 and over with a learning disability. If you or someone you care for has a learning disability, make sure the GP practice knows, as not everyone is on their **learning disability register**. Check with your GP to find out more.

Many young people aged 14 to 25 are missing these health checks, but they're very important. People with learning disabilities often have poorer physical and mental health due to preventable health issues. The annual health check helps to identify health concerns, and supports people to get treatments, screenings, vaccines, as well as creating a personal action plan for ongoing care.

While annual health checks are for people with learning disabilities, they are not automatically offered to autistic people without a learning disability. However, you can have autism noted in your records and request any reasonable adjustments you may need. Always mention that you or family member has a learning disability or autism when booking appointments.

# Communication



## What we hear from people

“How might the practice communicate with me?”

GP practices communicate via letters or telephone calls, through the NHS App or the online consultation system on their website.

Text messages are often used to convey important information and appointment reminders.

Please ensure all your contact details, including name, address, and telephone numbers, are correct, are kept up to date and if relevant, your preferred method of communication.

GP practice notice boards, social media and websites are also used to communicate information to patients.



# Ensuring accessibility

**The Accessible Information Standard requires any organisation providing NHS or social care to communicate in a way that everybody can understand. This includes GP practices.**

It ensures people with a disability or sensory loss can access and understand information, for example, in **large print** or **braille**, or **easy-read**.

Services must also support people to communicate, for example by arranging a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter, deafblind manual interpreter or an advocate.

## What GP services are expected to do

- Ask people if they have any information or communication needs, and find out how to meet their needs.
- Record those needs clearly and in a set way.
- Highlight or flag the person's file or notes so it is clear that they have information or communication needs.
- Share people's information and communication needs with other providers of NHS and adult social care, when they have consent to do so.
- Ensure people receive information that they can access and understand, and receive communication support if they need it.



# Having equal access

## Reasonable adjustments

Reasonable adjustments are things that need to be in place for an individual to have equal access to healthcare. They are sometimes referred to as personalised services because they should be tailored to a person's specific needs.

If you have specific needs or develop specific needs that require adjustments, it is best to discuss these with your GP practice as soon as possible. Do this prior to needing an appointment, so the practice can make the necessary adjustments in advance.

Reasonable adjustments can include **easy-read information, interpreters, hearing loops, sign language, physical adaptations, changing places** etc. They can also include changes to the way appointments are usually delivered such as longer appointments, quiet spaces and specific or supported means of communication.



# How to request reasonable adjustments

## Identify your needs:

- Consider what specific adjustments you need to access GP services effectively.

## Contact your GP practice:

- **Phone or visit:** Call or visit your GP practice and speak to the receptionist or practice manager.
- **Email or letter:** Send an email or letter outlining your needs and the adjustments you require.

## Provide details:

- Clearly explain your specific needs and why these adjustments are necessary for you.
- Mention any relevant medical conditions or disabilities.

## Request confirmation:

- Ask for written confirmation that your request has been received and will be accommodated.
- Follow up if you do not receive a response within a reasonable time frame.

## Use available resources:

- Refer to the **NHS Accessible Information Standard**, which requires healthcare providers to meet the communication needs of patients with disabilities.
- **Contact local advocacy services** if you need assistance in making your request.

# Your rights

**The NHS Constitution sets out the rights you have as a patient of GP services. All healthcare staff should involve you in decisions and treat you with kindness, dignity and respect. You have the right to complain if things don't go as you expect.**

Accessing GP services in the UK is a fundamental patient right. You are entitled to register with a General Practitioner (GP) and book appointments even if you are not from the area or do not have proof of address. GPs must assess the urgency of your health issue and aim to provide an appropriate appointment, whether it's same-day for urgent needs or within a reasonable time frame for less critical concerns. Consultations by video or telephone are also available, and you can request an in-person visit if needed.

Additionally, you are allowed to bring someone with you to your appointment for support, request a chaperone during examinations, and ask for a translation service if required. Patients have the right to express preferences for a male or female doctor, though availability might vary. If a complaint arises, every GP practice must provide a formal process for raising concerns.



# healthwatch

## Making care better together

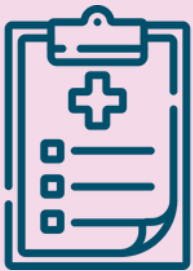


If you use health and social care services, Healthwatch North Yorkshire want to hear your experiences.

From GPs to care homes, dentistry to pharmacies, tell us how you found things. Then we'll make sure leaders and other decision-makers listen to what you've said (without using your name) and improve care for people locally. What you tell us won't affect your care.

Healthwatch doesn't handle complaints or personal cases. But we can help you get the right help.

## Confused about your care?



Your local Healthwatch can also help you navigate the health and social care system, including GP practices. Have a chat and see what we can do for you. We offer free and confidential guidance to get the information and advice you need.

## Get in touch

**01423 788 128**

**[Hello@hwny.co.uk](mailto:Hello@hwny.co.uk)**

**[HealthwatchNorthYorkshire.co.uk](http://HealthwatchNorthYorkshire.co.uk)**

**Freepost HEALTHWATCHNORTHYORKSHIRE**



# Tell your GP your views



## What we hear from people

“How do I share my experiences or those of someone I care for with a GP practice?”

### **Tell reception staff:**

Many practices will have a suggestion box in reception areas for feedback.

### **Complete a survey:**

Ensure you share your views on NHS annual patient surveys or any practice surveys you are invited to complete.

### **Join a patient participation group:**

All GP practices should have a patient participation group and welcome new members. Ask at reception for details if you would like to become involved and help improve delivery and patient experience for yourself and others.



# How to discuss an issue with your GP practice

**You have the right to expect good quality services from the GP practice. If you don't want to use Cloverleaf, speak to your GP practice. Do this if you're not happy with the service or care you receive or feel you've been treated unfairly.**

## **Step 1: Talk to your GP practice**

Try to raise the problems with the staff involved or the manager of the team to see if they can help. They may be able to solve the problem quickly before it gets any worse. You can do this in person or by phone, letter or email and they should acknowledge this within three days.

## **Step 2: Make a formal complaint with your GP practice**

If you've raised an informal complaint and feel it hasn't properly been resolved, or if your problem is quite serious, then you can make a formal complaint.

Every GP practice has a complaints procedure that explains who to contact, how they investigate and respond to a complaint, and what further action you can take if you remain dissatisfied.

Support is available from **Cloverleaf Advocacy service** should you need help with making a complaint. They can start support at any part of the process'. You can find out about how they can help you on the next page.

# How to get help with making a complaint

**Cloverleaf's independent health advocacy service is here to support you.**

## **Who can use this service?**

Available to anyone wanting to make a complaint about NHS services, including:

- People living in North Yorkshire
- Those treated outside North Yorkshire with NHS funding
- Adults raising complaints about their own or a family member's care

## **What does an independent health complaints advocate do?**

- Help the person understand the complaints process
- Support the person to make a complaint in writing
- Keep in touch with the person about complaint progress
- Attend complaints meetings with the person
- Help the person understand the outcome of their complaint
- Help people take their complaint to the Ombudsman if they are not happy with the result

## **How to contact Cloverleaf Advocacy:**

Phone 0300 012 4212

Email [NHScomplaints@cloverleaf-advocacy.co.uk](mailto:NHScomplaints@cloverleaf-advocacy.co.uk)



**Cloverleaf**  
*Advocacy*

# Another way you can make a complaint

**If you feel you can't raise an issue or complaint with your local doctors surgery, then you can make a complaint through the NHS organisation that commissions the GP practice. However, it is important to remember that you cannot complain to both.**

The NHS commissioner is known as an integrated care board. They are the organisation that arranges NHS services for people locally (also known as a commissioner).

## **For services in North Yorkshire (excluding Craven)**

Telephone: 01904 555 999

E-mail: [hnyicb.experience@nhs.net](mailto:hnyicb.experience@nhs.net)

Post: The Experience Team, NHS Humber and North Yorkshire Integrated Care Board, Health Place, Wrawby Road, Brigg. DN20 8GS

## **For services in Craven**

Telephone: 01924 552 150

Email: [wyicb.complaints@nhs.net](mailto:wyicb.complaints@nhs.net)

Post: NHS West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board, complaints team, White Rose House West Parade, Wakefield. WF1 1LT

## **If you're still unhappy...**

If you have followed the complaints procedure but do not think the issue has been resolved or are unhappy with the outcome you can ask the **Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman** for an independent review.

Phone: 0345 015 4033

Website: [www.ombudsman.org.uk/making-complaint](http://www.ombudsman.org.uk/making-complaint)

If you use British Sign Language, you can use SignVideo service



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