

How to use the National Health Service (NHS) in the UK

It's important that you know how the health service in the UK works so you can access the most suitable one for your illness or injury.

It also means that services like A&E can focus on treating people who need emergency medical help. If you have not registered with a GP then do this soon. Ask friends, family or in your community for a recommendation of a GP near where you live, and visit them to register. You'll need to register yourself as well as you your family members too.

A&E should only be used for things that are an emergency or life-threatening such as stroke, choking, loss of consciousness, a very high fever in a baby, a large open wound that won't stop bleeding, blacking out or fits that are not stopping

Looking after yourself at home (self care)

We all have a role to play in looking after ourselves and our families. There are many minor problems that you can treat at home, with the help of a basic first aid kits.

Coughs, colds, upset stomachs, hangovers, minor cuts and bruises and sore throats can all be treated at home with basic medication.

It's a good idea to keep a number of essential medicines at home that can help you could treat minor illnesses at home and avoid unnecessary trips to the doctor or A&E.

Your medicine cabinet might contain the following painkillers such as paracetamol and ibuprofen, cold and flu remedies, antihistamines, anti-diarrhoeal medicine, oral rehydration salts, indigestion remedies and a first aid kit including plasters and bandages, thermometer and tweezers. All of the above can be bought from your local pharmacy or supermarket without a prescription. Remember to keep all your medicines in a safe place, out of the reach of children and give the correct dose for the age of the person having the medicine.

[Here's a short guide to other health services available locally.](#)

Pharmacy

Pharmacists are medical professionals and are often based within doctor's surgeries and supermarkets, but also have their own premises in towns and villages.

They can help you with a variety of problems straight away which means you do not need to wait to see a GP.

When you go to a pharmacy, just ask to speak to the pharmacist and most will have a private consultation room you can use. They can help with aches, pains, allergies, hay fever, skin conditions, coughs and colds. They can also give advice about medicines, help with losing weight, drinking less alcohol, emergency contraception and give flu vaccinations.

NHS 111 or an out of hours GP

NHS 111 is the NHS non-emergency number. It is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones. It uses a translation service, and callers who do not speak English should state the name of the language they require so an interpreter can be used.

By calling 111 you will speak to a highly trained adviser who is supported by healthcare professionals. They will ask you a series of questions to assess your symptoms and immediately direct you to the best medical care for you.

If you need a GP but your GP practice is closed (in the evenings/overnight or at the weekends) then call NHS 111 to access the GP out of hours service.

Minor Injury Units and Urgent Treatment Centres

Your local Minor Injury Unit (MIU) or Urgent Treatment Centre (UTC) will treat most minor injuries and illnesses that are urgent but not life-threatening. It can help with cuts, broken bones, sprains, itches, bites (animal, insect and human), sports injuries, wound infections and minor burns and scalds. No appointment is needed and many are open seven days a week.

Visit www.nhs.uk to find one near you.

GP

Local doctors, also known as GPs, provide healthcare to their local community and they have at least eight years' of medical training and a university degree. They usually work with a team of other local health professionals.

They can help with a whole range of health problems including ear infections, flu vaccinations, back aches, stopping smoking, drinking less alcohol, mental health problems like depression or any illness or injury that won't go away. They also have baby clinics and midwives.

You will then be able to book an appointment to see a GP or discuss your medical problems. GPs are also able to give you a prescription for medication or refer you to hospital to see a consultant, hospital clinic or specialist.