

Cardiology - First Outpatient Appointment

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the NHS ability to provide routine elective services. We recognise that patients are waiting longer than we would all like and it is not always possible to identify when treatment will take place. This document provides you with information on how you are able to support yourself while waiting to attend the hospital. The guidance has been written by clinicians who are responsible for your care.

When you are waiting for further treatment it can sometimes feel like a long wait. The information and advice here is aimed at helping you manage that wait so you arrive for your appointment in the best possible physical and mental health.

The NHS has limited resources which means that we are unable to treat you as quickly as we would like. Each healthcare provider has to consider the type of help you need, how quickly you need treatment, the best course of action to help you and when and where you can be seen.

The process of sorting patients based on their individual needs is called prioritisation. The system of prioritisation is applied consistently across the NHS to help us to decide the order in which patients receive their treatment. This is essential to ensure that we provide care based on need. The system means that care is delivered in the fairest way possible.

Once a referral has been made from primary care to secondary care, the specialist team conduct assessments and then agree with you on the right course of action. At this stage, the urgency will be assessed. If you have a long-term health condition, for example, you may need treatment faster than someone without.

Within Cardiology, our waiting times for appointments have not increased significantly as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, however the unpredictability of Covid-19 and its effects on the hospital does mean that we occasionally need to cancel appointments last minute. Whilst we appreciate this may be frustrating, please be assured cancellations are always a last resort and we will try our best to avoid these where possible.

Cardiology is a medical speciality that covers all heart related conditions including Ischaemic Heart Disease, Angina, Heart Failure, Heart rhythm abnormalities and Valve abnormalities.

We routinely see patients with cardiac symptoms such as chest pain, palpitations, blackouts, and shortness of breath. We also see people with inherited cardiac conditions.

The Cardiology team may request investigations dependent on the symptoms you have and potential diagnoses. These include routine blood tests, Xrays, Transthoracic Echocardiogram (ultrasound scan of you heart), ambulatory ECG monitoring (you may have to wear a monitor for up to seven days), Cardiac CT scan

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(to look at the coronary arteries and heart structure) and Cardiac MRI (to look at heart structure and function).

Abnormalities detected through these investigations can often be treated with medical therapy, or invasive procedures performed at UHD such as angioplasty and stenting, pacemaker insertion, invasive treatment of arrhythmia (ablation), or possibly insertion of a defibrillator device. On occasion, specialist referral to another centre e.g. for surgical procedure is appropriate.

Guidance for Patients

There are several things you can do to improve your general health whilst you are waiting for your appointment;

Stop Smoking

Stopping smoking is probably the single biggest favour you can do your body, and while it may not be easy, there is a lot of support to help you. You can find out about local NHS services by phoning free on 0300 123 1044. You're far more likely to quit successfully by using a combination of support and smoking cessation aids, so why not make an appointment with a local pharmacist to take the first step.

Get Active

Regular exercise not only strengthens your heart and reduces the risk of both heart attack and stroke, it also offers additional benefits by reducing your risk of Osteoporosis and the risk of depression. Public Health England recommend spending 30 minutes a day, five times a week undertaking exercises that increase your heart rate. Simple things can be done from home and incorporated into your day-to-day routine without the need for a gym membership. We encourage you to stay active whilst waiting for your procedure, but keep well within the limits of any exertional symptoms.

Blood Pressure

High blood pressure is the single biggest risk factor for Stroke and puts additional strain on your heart. High blood pressure can be effectively controlled in the vast majority of cases with daily medication and therefore if you are prescribed medication to control your blood pressure, it is important you continue taking it.

Cholesterol

High Cholesterol is a contributing risk factor for heart attacks. Cholesterol is made up of LDL cholesterol and HDL cholesterol and high levels of LDL cholesterol leads to a build-up of damaging cholesterol in the coronary arteries. High cholesterol can be due to lifestyle or caused by an inherited condition called familial hypercholesterolaemia which runs in families and means your body is unable to process cholesterol properly. Your GP or nurse can check your cholesterol levels and advise on the next steps should you need to take further action.

Lose weight

Eating a heart-healthy diet, with more fruit and veg, swapping refined (white) foods or wholegrain or wholemeal ones, and butter or saturated fat for olive oil helps to reduce weight. Keeping your weight within healthy limits relieves the pressure on your heart and helps to reduce your blood pressure.

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The contents of this information has been reviewed and approved by the Medical Care Group Board of University Hospitals Dorset NHS Foundation Trust

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What should I do if my health is deteriorating?

Whilst waiting for your appointment, any changes in your symptoms should initially be discussed with your GP who can contact the hospital to expedite your appointment/seek specialised advice should they need to.

If you experience the following medical emergencies, please dial 999;

- Severe sudden onset chest pain, left arm or neck pain that does not settle within 10 minutes of resting,
- Unexplained collapse,
- Persistent extreme racing heart which makes you feel dizzy or causes loss of consciousness,
- Severe breathlessness either associated with a racing heart, or does not settle within 10 minutes of resting.

Urgent Health Advice

For urgent health advice about physical or mental health, when it's not an emergency, please call 111 from any landline or mobile phone. You can also visit www.nhs.uk. The NHS 111 service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Life Threatening Emergencies

For something life threatening – severe bleeding, breathing difficulties or chest pains – please dial 999.

Contact Us

For queries regarding your OP appointment, please contact the Poole Hospital OP appointment line on 0300 019 2823 or the Bournemouth Hospital OP appointment line on 0300 019 4740 or 0300 019 4738.