



# General Surgery – Keeping healthy





## Introduction

The General Surgery service at Bedfordshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust is based across both of our two sites, Bedford Hospital and Luton and Dunstable University Hospital, with a team of 11 consultant general surgeons.

## Support while you wait

The General Surgery service has been significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Our staff have worked tirelessly through the pandemic to meet unprecedented levels of demand, and unfortunately this has impacted our ability to deliver planned care. Though we must continue to prioritise the most critically unwell patients, we are doing everything we can to address the backlog of appointments with the provision of extra clinics and surgical sessions when possible.

We know that you have experienced a long wait for your hospital appointment or treatment and understand how distressing this must be. We would like to apologise for this and assure you that we are working hard to reach you as quickly as we can. We are exploring all possible options for increasing activity safely to reduce waiting times.

To support you while you wait and to let you know that we are still here for you, we have created this platform to give you information and advice. It has been designed to help you manage your condition and your overall health.

During this waiting period, you may have further questions about your proposed treatment, or your health may have changed. In this instance, we would like you to call and speak to a member of the team. If you need to contact the clinical team, please contact your surgeon's secretary, their contact details will be on the most recent letter from your surgeon.

## During your appointment

You will be asked some questions at your appointment - here are some examples to think about.

If your appointment is to discuss the possibility of an operation or treatment, the healthcare professional you are seeing will talk to you about:

- How your condition is affecting your life and what matters to you.
- What any tests, examinations or investigations about your condition have found.
- The possible benefits of having an operation for you.
- What risks there might be for you from having the operation.
- How your operation would be carried out and whether you might need to stay overnight.



- Whether there is a choice of providers for your treatment – sometimes it is possible to have your appointment more quickly by travelling out of your local area or if a private provider has been asked to deliver your care.
- How long it might take you to recover and what you might need to do as part of your recovery. For example, attending appointments to have your dressings changed.
- Whether there are any activities that you won't be able to do for a while afterwards, for example certain kinds of work, household tasks like cleaning or doing the laundry, or driving.
- What alternatives to having an operation there might be for you.
- What would be likely to happen if you don't have any treatment.
- Your healthcare professional will also talk to you about how long you might have to wait for your operation and the things you can do to stay as well as possible while you are waiting.
- They will also take the time to ensure you understand all the information they have given you.

Please remember that it is okay to ask questions. Your healthcare provider wants you to have all the information that you need to help you decide what the best plan and right treatment is for you. It is your right to be involved as much or as little as you would like in making decisions about your health and care plans. There is no pressure to decide on your treatment plan at your appointment, if you need more time to think about it and discuss with your family and friends, it is okay to ask for this.

## Cancelling your appointment / surgery

We understand that some patients may choose to have their appointment and treatment elsewhere. We advocate patient choice on where you access treatment though please do let us know if you no longer require an appointment with us. It is important that you notify us at the soonest possible opportunity so we can remove you from the waiting list. This can be done via telephone or online.

If you have been listed for surgery by your surgeon but no longer wish to proceed with this, please contact:

- Bedford Hospital Admissions Office: **01234 792218** or **01234 355122**
- Luton & Dunstable Hospital Waiting List Office on: **01582 497379** or **01582 497515**

## Preparing for your treatment

It is a good idea to prepare your body and mind prior to any treatment. In the time before your treatment, you can take simple steps to help improve your physical and mental health. This can help to reduce your risk of complications from any surgery and improve your wellbeing now and during your recovery. Think of this as 'prehabilitation'. Research shows that people who keep mentally or physically active feel happier and healthier.



Maintaining and improving your overall wellbeing will lead to a faster recovery if you require surgery. It is a good idea to make the most of the time before you see your specialist by stopping smoking, maintaining a healthy weight, getting fitter and drinking less alcohol. Support is available to help you and can be found in the pages in this section.

For more information and advice, you can [watch a helpful video from the Royal College of Anaesthetists - Preparing for surgery: Fitter Better Sooner.](#)

## Take your medication

Please continue to take any medication as advised and prescribed by your GP or other healthcare professionals until you are informed to make any changes that may be required for treatment.

It is important to bring a list of the medications you are taking to all appointments. If you have any queries please contact your GP.

## Keep moving

Your heart and lungs have to work harder after an operation to help the body to heal. If you are already active, they will be used to this. While you are waiting for your operation, try and increase your activity levels. Brisk walking, swimming, cycling, gardening, or playing with your children are all helpful.

Try to do any activity which makes you feel out of breath at least three times per week, but always check with your doctor first what type of exercise is most appropriate for you. Activities that improve your strength and balance will also be useful for your recovery.

Below are some resources which could be helpful in aiding your prehabilitation and recovery:

**NHS - Better Health:** <https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/>

**NHS - Exercise resources:** <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise>

**Health matters: physical activity - prevention and management of long-term conditions:** <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-matters-physical-activity/health-matters-physical-activity-prevention-and-management-of-long-term-conditions>

**Dr. Zoe Williams - NHS GP and PHE Physical Activity Clinical Champion Interview – YouTube:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=59ntVvTXJFc>



# Improve your health

## One You (NHS Hub)

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou>

- One You provides tips, tools, support and encouragement every step of the way, to help improve your health right away.
- You are not alone – One You can help you make small changes yourself, or with friends and family.

## Smoking

Stopping smoking is hard, but the good news is that quitting or cutting down shortly before treatment can improve wound healing and lung function and reduce the length of any stay in hospital. Preparing for surgery offers a real opportunity to commit to stopping smoking.

## Weight

If you are overweight, losing weight can help reduce the stress on your heart and lungs. In addition, it can help to:

- Lower your blood pressure
- Improve your blood sugar levels
- Reduce joint pain
- Reduce your risk of blood clots after surgery
- Reduce your risk of wound infections after surgery
- Allow you to exercise more easily.

## Alcohol

Alcohol can have many effects on the body, but importantly it can reduce the liver's ability to produce the building blocks necessary for healing. Make sure you are drinking within the recommended limits, or lower, to improve your body's ability to heal.

## Managing medical conditions

Many medical conditions can affect recovery from surgery. It is important to make sure any known conditions are controlled as well as possible ahead of your surgery. You can also book in for a general health check at your GP surgery if you are between 40 and 74 years old.

## Diabetes

Good control of your blood sugar is really important to reduce your risk of infections after surgery. Think about your diet and weight and talk to your diabetes nurse or team early to see if they need to make any changes to your treatment.

## Blood pressure

Blood pressure should be controlled to safe levels to reduce your risk of stroke. Sometimes operations may be delayed if it is too high. Have your blood pressure checked at your surgery well ahead of your operation – some GP surgeries have automated machines so you can pop in any time. If it is high, your GP can check your medications



and make any changes needed ahead of the operation.

### Anaemia (low blood count)

If you have been bleeding or have a chronic medical condition, a blood test can check whether you are anaemic. If you are, you should talk to your GP about treatment to improve your blood count before surgery. Treating your anaemia before surgery reduces the chance of you needing a blood transfusion. It will also help your recovery and make you feel less tired after your surgery.

### Heart, lung, and other medical problems

If you have any other long-term medical problems, consider asking your GP or nurse for a review of your medications, especially if you think your health is not as good as it could be.

### Dental health

If you have loose teeth or crowns, a visit to the dentist may reduce the risk of damage to your teeth during an operation.

### COVID-19 vaccination

If you are eligible for a COVID-19 vaccination, it is recommended that you have this prior to attending hospital appointments or surgery. To find out if you are eligible, [visit the NHS COVID-19 vaccination pages](#). If you are eligible and would [like to book your vaccination appointment, visit the national booking service](#).

### Healthy living

It's normal to feel anxious about treatment - improving your health beforehand can help you recover. People who are able to improve their health and activity levels recover more quickly after treatment.

We all have parts of our lives that we would like to change, whether that is stopping smoking or achieving and maintaining a healthier weight. The good news is that as well as improving your health in the long term, making those changes ahead of your treatment can reduce your risk of a range of complications and can also help you recover more quickly from any surgery.

### Managing pain

You may be in pain or discomfort while you are waiting for an appointment or treatment. Pain can have a huge impact on our lives, from how we move, to our mood and sleep quality. Frustratingly, pain can affect what matters most to us in life, be it our relationships with family and friends, to our ability to work and take part in hobbies. Everyone's pain experience is unique, and everyone has different goals that they would like to work towards. Having better knowledge around your condition can help you to increase your confidence when making decisions around what to change and how to take back control of your life.

### Money worries

Treatment could affect how many hours you are able to work, and how much you are earning. If you are struggling to pay bills, need help with a benefits issue, or are concerned



about growing debt, there is free, confidential support and advice available.

- Benefit Calculator - Turn2Us (<https://benefits-calculator.turn2us.org.uk>)
- Free Debt Advice - Step change ([https://www.stepchange.org/?channel=ppc&gclid=Cj0KCQiA5OuNBhCRARIsACgaiqWqrypILKfryDhpGNnl\\_SVXX2po9jQKylEb\\_rgGoa8ivlqMqiAdHBQaAomdEALw\\_wcB](https://www.stepchange.org/?channel=ppc&gclid=Cj0KCQiA5OuNBhCRARIsACgaiqWqrypILKfryDhpGNnl_SVXX2po9jQKylEb_rgGoa8ivlqMqiAdHBQaAomdEALw_wcB))
- NHS - Low income Scheme (<https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/nhs-low-income-scheme>)
- Access to Work - Employment support programme that aims to help more disabled people start or stay in work (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/access-to-work-factsheet/access-to-work-factsheet-for-customers>)

Your local Citizens Advice can help you find a way forward, whatever the problem. They offer confidential information and advice to assist people with legal, debt, consumer, housing, and other problems. Contact your local Citizens Advice (<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/>) office for more information and access to online support.

### Carers can need help too - support is available

We know that there are many people who are caring for family and friends while they are waiting for a hospital appointment or treatment. This might include help with washing, dressing, shopping, and taking medicines and also emotional support, ensuring that the person feels cared for and not alone. Carers UK (<https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/get-support>) are a national charity that offers support for carers with employment, practical support, technology and equipment among other things.

### Good mental health

People sometimes feel worried or anxious before a hospital appointment or treatment. This is perfectly normal. Some people might also find that an existing mental health condition gets worse. You can find helpful links for mental health support on the NHS website: [www.nhs.uk/mental-health/](http://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/)

Mental health charity Mind also has webpages about COVID-19 and your wellbeing: [www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing](http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing)

Talking therapies, or psychological therapies, are effective and confidential treatments delivered by fully trained and accredited NHS practitioners. They can help with common mental health problems like stress, anxiety and depression.

## Access to support where you live

Our patients come to us from many different counties. Here you will find further support available to you in the location you live.

### Bedfordshire

<https://www.bedford.gov.uk/social-care-health-and-community/public-health/>

- Stop smoking



- Drugs and alcohol
- Emotional wellbeing
- Healthy weight – Links to more life – <https://www.more-life.co.uk/what-we-do/ourservices/in-your-area/bedford>
- NHS health checks
- Health protection

### Luton

<https://www.totalwellbeingluton.org/>

- Emotional health
- Stop smoking
- Weight management
- Exercise on referral
- Long term conditions
- Social prescriptions

### Milton Keynes

<https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/health-and-wellbeing-hub>

- Mental health and wellbeing
- Stop smoking
- Drugs & alcohol
- Healthy weight – Links to more life –
  - <https://www.more-life.co.uk/what-we-do/ourservices/in-your-area/bedford>

### Northamptonshire

<https://www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/councilservices/health/Pages/default.aspx>

- Active living
- Eating well
- Mental wellbeing
- Stop smoking
- Weight management
- Drugs & alcohol
- Social wellbeing

### Cambridgeshire

[www.bewellcambridgeshire.co.uk](http://www.bewellcambridgeshire.co.uk)

- Mental health and wellbeing
- Smoking
- Active living
- Healthy eating
- Alcohol

### Hertfordshire

[www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/health-in-herts/health-in-herts.aspx](http://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/health-in-herts/health-in-herts.aspx)

- Wellbeing and mental health
- Healthy weight





## My Planned Care Patient Information Platform



**Bedfordshire Hospitals**  
NHS Foundation Trust

- Keep active
- Stop smoking
- Drugs and alcohol
- Long term conditions