

Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic the number of people on our waiting lists for elective surgery (operations planned in advance) has grown significantly. While we have continued to provide the most urgent care at all times, there has been a significant impact on the length of time many of our patients are having to wait and we are very sorry for this. We hope that this patient information platform gives you the information you need to support yourself while waiting to attend your appointment.

Most importantly, we encourage you to keep talking and to keep active. It's vital that you stay as healthy as you can, both physically and mentally, so you can be ready for your treatment. This will help you get the best results in the long term. There are online tools and resources listed below to help you keep active, and to support your mental health.

For some procedures and surgical interventions you may wish to rethink having your surgery or you may want to ask more questions about risks and precautions. In some cases, people are already being contacted to ask about their symptoms and if they still want to go ahead with surgery at the current time, and we would like you to help us understand how you feel about your surgery and if you have any questions you would like to ask.

Improve your health

It is important that while you are waiting for your surgery you remain as active and as medically fit as possible. This can also help you to recover more quickly afterwards. If you have any long-standing conditions such as high blood pressure, you should get this regularly reviewed at your GP surgery to make sure it remains well controlled. This will also help to prevent any unnecessary delays when you come in for your pre-operative assessment. Maintaining a well-balanced diet is also important, as is reducing any excessive weight that may be impacting on your general health. If you are a current smoker or drink heavily, we'd strongly advise you to seek support to help with stopping.

The NHS website has lots of tools and support to help with your general health and fitness. Some useful websites are listed below:

For help and support with losing weight: www.nhs.uk/better-health/lose-weight/

For advice on eating well: www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/

For help and support with getting or keeping active: www.nhs.uk/better-health/get-active/

For help and support with quitting smoking: www.nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking/

For help and support with drinking less alcohol: www.nhs.uk/better-health/drink-less/

Managing pain

Some people are in pain or discomfort while they are waiting for a hospital appointment or treatment. You can find help and advice on managing ongoing pain on the NHS website: www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/how-to-get-nhs-help-for-your-pain/

My Planned Care Patient Information Platform

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy also has helpful information on managing pain: www.csp.org.uk/public-patient

If your pain is getting worse or you are finding it difficult to cope with, contact your GP or NHS 111.

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/

Mental health charity Mind also has webpages about COVID-19 and your wellbeing: 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. You can self refer here: www.somersetft.nhs.uk/somerset-talking-therapies/refer-yourself/ or call to book yourself in for an emotional health check: 0300 323 00 33.

Patients with caring responsibilities

Waiting for hospital treatment can be a particularly worrying time for patients who are also carers for others, as they need to think also about the loved one they are caring for and make alternative arrangements for them when it is time for them to attend hospital. The Community Council for Somerset is contracted by Somerset County Council to run the Somerset Carers service. There are over 60,000 unpaid carers in Somerset. If you regularly look after someone in an unpaid capacity, Somerset Carers can support you with advice and guidance: www.ccslovesomerset.org/somerset-carers/

We hope that you have found this information useful. Please remember that you can also talk to our patient advice service (PALS) who provide confidential advice and support to patients, families and their carers, and can provide information on the NHS and health related matters. Our PALS is here to help when you need advice, have concerns or don't know where to turn. For queries please contact PALS@SomersetFT.nhs.uk or call 01823 343536.