

Introduction

The COVID 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 like and that it is not always possible to say when treatment will take place. This document provides our patients with information on how you can support yourself while waiting for treatment at the hospital. The guidance has been written by the clinicians who are responsible for your care.

My Support

If you and your healthcare team have decided that a procedure is the next step, or if you are already on a waiting list for treatment, you might be thinking about what it will involve, how it might affect you and how long you can expect to wait.

It is important to think about how you could keep yourself well while you are waiting. This information might be useful if you need any help or support.

Social Prescribing

The local Social Prescribing Service may be able to support you while you are waiting for treatment. Social prescribing helps people with problems that affect their health and wellbeing, offering support that is not medical but could help with problems like caring responsibilities, managing at home or difficulty working. You can ask your GP to refer you to the local social prescribing scheme.

Take Your Medication

It is important to take medication correctly as prescribed. Doctors prescribe medications to treat your symptoms and to help you manage or treat certain health conditions. Failing to take medicines as prescribed can result in worse health, longer recovery, unwanted side effects, substance use disorders, death or other serious health conditions that would require intensive treatment.

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Always read all the information provided before using a new medication and ask your doctor or pharmacist for help and clarification if you are confused or not sure about how to properly take the medication. This can prevent mis-understandings and confusion that could lead to accidentally taking the wrong dose. Your doctor or pharmacist will also be able to explain any possible side effects.

If you run out of medicine outside of your GP surgery's normal opening hours and need medication urgently, there are a few ways to get an emergency supply quickly, even if you're away from home.

- If your local pharmacy is closed, you can get your medicine from any pharmacy as long as they have it in stock. Use the [NHS pharmacy service search](#) to find other nearby pharmacies and their opening hours – some are open until midnight or later, even on public holidays.
- If you'd like to speak to someone first, call [NHS 111](#) free of charge by dialling 111 on your mobile or landline. The person you speak to can look up an out-of-hours pharmacy or another NHS service in your area.
- You can also use the [NHS walk-in centre service search](#) to find your nearest walk-in centre. These can sometimes dispense medicines after a consultation.
- If it's urgent, you can call your GP surgery. They should have details of their out-of-hours service recorded on their answering machine. This is the service your GP runs outside their usual opening hours and on public holidays – do not use this routinely. You can use the [NHS GP service finder](#) to find your GP surgery's phone number.
- If it's an emergency and you've tried all of the above unsuccessfully, use the service search to [find your nearest A&E](#).

If you do not have a prescription

If you run out of prescription medicine and do not have a prescription with you, you can get an emergency supply from a pharmacy without a prescription.

Take an old prescription or the medicine's packaging with you, if you have it.

Pharmacies

You'll be assessed by the pharmacist to find out:

- if you need the medicine immediately
- who previously prescribed the medicine (to make sure they're a trusted source)
- what dose of the medicine would be appropriate for you to take

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The pharmacist needs to know the answers to all of these questions before they can supply a prescription-only medicine without a prescription in an emergency. They will keep a record of your details, the medicine they provide and the nature of the emergency.

If the pharmacist is not satisfied that the medicine and dose is appropriate for you, they may not supply the medicine.

The pharmacist may provide an emergency supply of up to 30 days' treatment for most prescription medicines, with these exceptions:

- insulin, an ointment, a cream or an asthma inhaler – only the smallest pack size will be supplied
- the contraceptive pill – only enough for a full treatment cycle will be supplied
- liquid oral antibiotics – only the smallest quantity to provide a full course of treatment will be supplied

Only a limited range of controlled medicines can be prescribed in an emergency, such as those for epilepsy (phenobarbital). Many commonly used controlled medicines, such as morphine or diamorphine, cannot be supplied without a prescription by a pharmacist in an emergency.

You may need to pay for this service and medicine, even if you do not normally, because they're being provided without a prescription. This may vary between pharmacies.

[Find a local pharmacy](#), including its opening hours.

GPs and walk-in centres

If you run out of medicine while you're away from home, you may be able to have a consultation with a [local GP](#) and get a prescription for a limited supply of medicines. You'll then need to find a pharmacy that's open.

You can also go to an NHS walk-in centre. They may be able to organise a GP consultation. Sometimes, they can give you medicine after you've seen a nurse.

Some walk-in centres are open from early morning to late evening, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

[Find a walk-in centre near you](#)

<https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/prescriptions-and-pharmacies/pharmacies/out-of-hours-medicines/>

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Some other useful tips for taking your prescribed medications include:

- Take medication at the same time each day to prevent overlapping of doses
- Keep an up to date list of all the medications you are taking (including any over the counter medicines, supplements etc) on hand so that you can show this to any doctor or specialist who will then be able to prescribe any new medication avoiding interactions
- Always check if you should take medication on an empty or full stomach
- Build taking medication in to your daily routine so you don't forget to take it, eg after breakfast, before brushing your teeth at night
- Use a daily pill counter to keep track of whether you've taken your daily doses
- Refill your daily pill counter on the same day every week to avoid doubling up on doses
- Never share or give away medications. This is illegal and dangerous and could harm anyone who takes your medication without a prescription.
- Take extra supplies of your medications with you when travelling in case you have to stay longer than planned
- Always pack your medications in your hand luggage/carry on bag when travelling by plane
- Never stop using your medication unless directed to do so by a doctor as stopping some medicines suddenly can lead to side effects, sometimes severe.

<https://www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/medicines/>

Finding a Pharmacy

You can find a pharmacy near you by searching on NHS Choices or alternatively see the local listings.

<http://www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Pharmacy/LocationSearch/10>

Keep Moving / Improve your health

Regular physical activity is an important way to improve the quality and length of your life.

The **Health in Herts** website is full of useful information, tips and advice for keeping active.

<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/health-in-herts/health-in-herts.aspx>

Stop Smoking Service

<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/health-in-herts/smoking/stop-smoking-service.aspx>

Call 0800 389 3998.

Text SMOKEFREE to 80818

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The contents of this information have been reviewed and approved by the Clinical Decision Panel of West Hertfordshire Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust.

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Healthy Weight

<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/health-in-herts/healthy-weight.aspx>

Good Mental Health

The COVID pandemic has caused emotional strain for many people. The lack of social contact due to social distancing during lockdowns has also made it more difficult for some people to cope. There is a wide range of resources and support to help people manage their mental health, with helplines, support groups and other self-help tools.

<https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/>

<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/about-the-council/news/news-archive/everyone-needs-a-little-support>

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

<https://www.mindinmidherts.org.uk/>

NHS 111

NHS 111 can be contacted by anyone experiencing a mental health crisis. Calls are free from any phone seven days a week, 24 hours a day.



The poster is a dark blue rectangle with white and light blue text. At the top right is the NHS logo. Below it, the text reads 'Hertfordshire Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust'. The main headline is 'Mental health support at any time of the day or night'. Below that is the helpline number 'Helpline: 0300 777 0707'. To the right of the number is a circular icon of a telephone handset with the number '24' inside. Below the helpline number, it says 'We are available 24/7 for Herts residents who:' followed by a bulleted list: '• are experiencing a mental health crisis', '• need some mental health support', and '• just want to talk'. At the bottom, it provides the email address 'Email: hpft.spa@nhs.net (for non-urgent queries)'.

Additional contacts:

Samaritans <https://www.samaritans.org/>

Whatever you're going through, you can call Samaritans any time (24/7), from any phone for free. Call 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org (response time: 24 hours).

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Shout

A free 24/7 text service, for anyone in crisis anytime, anywhere. Text "SHOUT" to 85258.

Sane

Out of hours helpline Tel: 0300 304 7000 from 4.30pm - 10.30pm every day.