

GPs and your mental health

A GP is a doctor that can give you treatment and care for your physical and mental health. This factsheet explains how a GP decides what treatment and care to offer you. And how to prepare for a GP appointment. This information is for adults affected by mental illness in England. It's also for their carers and loved ones and anyone interested in this subject.

Key Points.

- If you don't have a GP you can register with a practice, even if you are homeless.
- You can prepare for your GP appointment to get the most out of it.
- A GP will ask you about your mental health symptoms and maybe your physical health.
- GPs can offer you talking therapy services and medication, and other treatment and advice.
- GPs can refer you to others like specialist NHS mental health services, a link worker or a drugs and alcohol team.
- You have options if you have problems with your GP, including if you are banned from your surgery.
- If you're having a mental health crisis you can ask for urgent help. This includes calling your local NHS urgent mental health helpline.

This factsheet covers:

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1. How do I get a GP?

If you have a mental or physical health problem, you will normally see a GP to begin with. Unless you need urgent or emergency care. If you need urgent help for your mental health, see [section 8](#) of this factsheet.

GP means general practitioner.

GPs can treat many conditions and give health advice. They can also refer you to other NHS services.

You can register with a local GP surgery. But if you are not registered with the GP surgery, you can still see one urgently if you need to. We give information on these things below.

How do I register with a GP?

You can find your local GP surgeries on the NHS webpage here:

www.nhs.uk/service-search/other-services

Or you can dial 111 to call 'NHS 111.' You can ask them for local surgery contact details.

You usually need to be in a surgery's catchment area to register there. The catchment area is the local area that the surgery covers.¹

GP surgeries can take patients from outside their area, but they don't have to. Registering with a GP surgery outside your area may mean you can't get:²

- home visits, or
- other community services, including physiotherapy and midwife appointments.

To register at a GP surgery, you can call them to ask or visit reception. You will have to fill in a registration form. You might be able to do this online. The form will ask general questions such as your name, address, date of birth and details of any previous GP.³

It's free to register. You do not need proof of address or immigration status, ID, or an NHS number.⁴

Once you have registered with a GP surgery you will have a named GP. They have overall responsibility for your care at the surgery, but you can see any GP who works there.⁵

What if I have different GP surgeries to choose from?

You may have a few different GP surgeries to choose from.

To help you decide where to register you could compare what facilities they offer. For example, you could find out if they offer same day appointments or telephone appointments.

You can check what services a GP surgery offers and the quality of care you can expect. You can do this on the **Care Quality Commission (CQC)** website here: www.cqc.org.uk/care-services/find-family-doctor-or-gp

The CQC is the independent regulator of health and adult social care in England. They monitor, inspect, and regulate NHS and social care services.

What are NHS urgent treatment centres (UTC)?⁶

You can go to an UTC to get urgent treatment for most common things people go to A&E for.

The professionals who treat you there include GPs. They are open every day for at least 12 hours a day.

You can:

- get an appointment through calling NHS 111, or by visiting their website at <https://111.nhs.uk>,
- get an appointment by contacting your GP, or
- you can walk into your nearest urgent treatment centre without an appointment.⁷

You can find your local UTC by clicking on this link:

www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/other-services/Walk-in%20centre/LocationSearch/663

You can watch this NHS England video on YouTube to find out more about UTCs: www.youtube.com/watch?v=4dCr_RoZEIs

What if I'm not registered with the GP but I need to see one urgently?

If you don't have a GP but need to see one urgently you can:

- go to an NHS urgent treatment centre, or
- speak to your local GP surgery. They can give you treatment for up to 14 days.⁸

What can I do if a GP surgery refuses to register me?⁹

A GP surgery must explain in writing the reason for refusing to register you.

A GP surgery can refuse to register you if:

- they cannot take on new patients,
- they are not accepting patients that do not live within its boundary, or
- they think it is not appropriate for you to register with them as they are a long way from where you live.

If a GP surgery refuses to register you, you can:

- try to register with another surgery,
- call the NHS England Customer Contact Centre on 0300 311 22 33,
- contact your local Healthwatch. You can find their details on this website: www.healthwatch.co.uk/your-local-healthwatch/list,
- complain to the practice manager of the GP surgery, if you think the criteria above doesn't apply. See [section 6](#) of this factsheet under 'How can I make a complaint?'

Can I see a GP if I'm in England but away from home?¹⁰

If you need to see a GP while away from home, you can contact the nearest practice to ask for treatment. You can receive treatment for up to 14 days.

If you need treatment for longer than 14 days, you will need to register as a temporary patient. This allows you to be treated by a GP surgery for up to 3 months. After 3 months you will need to register as a permanent patient.

Can I see a GP if I am homeless?¹¹

You can register at a GP surgery if you are homeless.

You can use a friend's address, the address of a day centre or the address of the GP surgery when you register.

You do not have to provide ID when registering with a GP. It isn't considered to be a reasonable ground for refusing you. But it would be helpful to take at least one of the documents below when registering with your GP if you have them:

- passport,
- birth certificate,
- rough sleepers' identity badge,
- hostel registration,
- mail forwarding letter, or
- HC2 certificate. This is a certificate you get if you have applied for the NHS Low Income Scheme.

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2. How do I make an appointment?

Once you are registered you can contact the GP surgery to make an appointment. You can usually call them, contact them online or visit them.

What happens when I make contact by phone or face-to-face?

You will speak to a receptionist. They will book the appointment for you with a GP.

The receptionist might ask you basic details about your health problem. This is to make sure they book you an appointment with the right medical professional to meet your needs. Other than GP's, medical professionals like nurses and physiotherapists sometimes work at GP surgeries.

But you do not need to tell the receptionist why you want an appointment if you don't want to. Or you can just keep it very brief and say something like, "it's to do with my mental health."

You can choose to see:

- the first GP available,
- a specific GP,
- the same GP you saw last time.

When you book your appointment, you can ask the receptionist the following.

- Is there is a GP with a background or interest in mental health that I can see?
- Can I see female GP?
- Can I see a male GP?
- Do the surgery offer phone appointments?
- Can I book a double appointment?

A double appointment means you have more time to speak to the GP. GP appointments usually last no longer than 10 minutes. If your GP surgery is very busy, they may not be able to give you a double appointment.

Can I make an appointment online?¹²

Your GP surgery may have an online booking service for you to make an appointment.

You can ask your GP surgery about their online services.

You may be also able to the following things online:

- contact your GP, nurse or other healthcare professional for advice and support,
- order repeat prescriptions,
- see parts of your health record, including information about medicines, vaccinations, and test results, and
- see communications between your GP surgery and other services, such as hospitals.

You can find out more about NHS online services by clicking on the following link: www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/gps/online-health-and-prescription-services

How long will I have to wait to see a GP?

The waiting time for an appointment to see a GP will be different at different GP surgeries. It can vary to a few weeks.

Ask for an emergency appointment if you need to see someone urgently. But you might not be able to see your regular GP.

Can I see a healthcare professional in the evening or at the weekend? ¹³

You can now see a healthcare professional on:

- weekday evenings between 6.30pm and 8pm, and
- Saturdays between 9am and 5pm.

You can contact your GP surgery to book evening and weekend appointments. You may be able to get an appointment on the same day.

You may be offered an appointment at:

- your GP surgery,
- another local GP surgery, or
- another local NHS service.

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3. How do I prepare for my appointment?

You can write down or think about:

- what you want to talk about in the appointment,
- and questions you want to ask the GP, and
- what you want to get from the appointment.

This can help if you are feeling anxious and can help you to remember questions you want to ask.

You can write down or think about:

- your symptoms,
- if they get worse at certain times or when you do certain things,
- anything else you think your GP needs to know, such as any medication you're taking.

A mood diary can help you keep track of your symptoms, how you're feeling and how your mood affects you. We have included a mood diary at the [end of this factsheet](#).

Can I take someone with me?

Yes. This might be a loved one or advocate. An advocate is someone outside of the NHS who can offer you support and help you to get your voice heard.

if you plan to take someone with you, your GP surgery may want to know before your appointment.

Your loved one could go into the appointment with you, or you can ask them to wait outside or in reception.

You can find more information about '**Advocacy for mental health – Making your voice heard**' at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

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4. What will happen at my appointment?

During the appointment your GP will ask you:

- what you are having issues with,
- what your symptoms are, and
- questions to help them understand more about the health issue that you have. The issue might affect your mental health, physical health, or both.

The GP will ask you these things so they can think about the best advice and treatment options to offer you.

Try and be as honest as possible with your GP. Give them as much detail as you can about how you're feeling and what your symptoms are.

GPs are used to dealing with patients who want to talk about their mental health. The mental health charity Mind say 2 out of 5 GP appointments involve mental health.¹⁴

Your GP has a record of your medical history on their computer to help them.

Appointments usually last around 10 minutes.

Your GP might offer you medication or other treatment. They might offer to refer you to:

- a talking therapy service,
- a specialist mental health team,
- a link worker, or
- a drugs and alcohol team.

They could also offer to give you advice and options on things such as:

- how to reduce stress,
- how to get restful sleep,
- exercise, or
- nutrition.

You can find out more information about:

- NHS mental health teams
- Drugs, alcohol and mental health

at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheets.

What is a link worker?

A link worker can try to connect you to community-based support. This can include activities and services that meet your practical, social, and emotional needs that affect your health and wellbeing.¹⁵

A link worker is part of what is known as social prescribing. This is non-medical option to help improve your wellbeing.

A link worker will work with you to find out what is important to you.¹⁶ They can connect you with local support such as:

- activity groups,
- support groups,
- services, such as charities, and
- social services.

Link workers are not yet available in all areas of the country yet. But the NHS is working to expand this service.¹⁷

What talking therapy will I be offered?

Your GP might offer to refer you to NHS talking therapy services or tell you how to self-refer to them.

The term 'therapy' covers a range of approaches and methods. You may also hear talking therapy being called psychotherapy or counselling.

The type of therapy you will be offered by services will depend upon your symptoms and diagnosis, if you have one.

You can find out more information about '**Talking therapies**' at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheets.

What medication will I be offered?

Your doctor should explain to you all your medication options. You should be involved with your care decisions.

You can tell your GP if:

- there is a certain medication or treatment that you would like to try, or
- if you are experiencing side effects that you are finding difficult to deal with.

You can ask:

- why you have been given a certain treatment. Your GP should tell you how it can help you and explain possible side effects,
- how well your treatment works and what you should do if it doesn't work and
- if there is anything else you can do to help yourself.

Medication for severe mental illnesses like schizophrenia or bipolar disorder should first be prescribed by a psychiatrist. But a GP can prescribe them, as say repeat a prescription, if they have had advice from a psychiatrist.¹⁸

You can check what treatment is recommended for your condition on the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines. NICE produce guidelines for how health professionals should treat certain conditions. You can search for these on their website at: www.nice.org.uk.

You can find out more information about '**Medication – choice and managing problems**' at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheets.

Will I have to pay for treatment and care?

Your treatment and care through your GP is free. If you are referred for talking treatments through the NHS, they should be provided for free too.

But you may need to pay for a prescription if you need medication. You can find out more information about paying for prescriptions at: www.mentalhealthandmoneyadvice.org/en/mental-health-care/how-do-i-pay-for-prescriptions.

Will a record be made of my appointment?

The GP will write down what you talk about in your appointment. This will include your symptoms and any treatment they give you or offer to you.

The GP will record this on your medical notes. Your notes will be kept confidential. This means they should not pass them on to anyone else unless:¹⁹

- you agree,
- It is reasonable to, or
- it is necessary to.

You can ask to see a copy of your medical notes.

You can find out more information about:

- Access to health records
- Confidentiality

at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheets.

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5. What could happen after my appointment?

When might I want a follow up appointment?

You can arrange a follow-up appointment with your GP. You might want a follow-up appointment if:

- you have any problems with your treatment,
- you are not getting better, or
- your symptoms get worse.

If you have been given medication your GP might offer check-ups to see how it is working and how you are feeling.

What is a medicines use review (MUR)?

You can also go to your pharmacist for a medicines use review (MUR). This is a free service.

In an MUR you can speak to a pharmacist about all the medications you are taking. They can explain what your medications are for. They can also tell you about any potential side effects.²⁰

When might I see an NHS specialist mental health team?

Your GP may refer you to a specialist mental health team to get more experienced help. They might do this if:

- has tried all options,
- thinks your problems are too complex for them to deal with, or
- feels you are at risk of suicide or self-harm.

The teams are made up of mental health professionals such as psychiatrists, psychologists, community psychiatric nurses, social workers, support workers and occupational therapists.

The most common mental health teams are:

- Community mental health team (CMHT)
- Crisis team
- Early intervention in psychosis team

- Teams that deal with specific conditions, such as personality disorders or eating disorders.

You can find out more information about '**NHS mental health teams**' at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheets.

What are physical health checks for people who live with severe mental illness?

You might be diagnosed with schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or other psychosis or be having lithium therapy. If so, NHS England say you should receive a full physical health check each year from a medical professional, like your GP or a practice nurse.

Also, you should be on your GP surgery's severe mental illness register. If you're on the register, you should receive an invite for a full physical health check at least once a year.

The health checks are important. Living with a severe mental illness means that you can be more likely to develop physical health issues than the general population.

You can find out more information about **Severe mental illness and physical health checks** on our website here:
www.rethink.org/advice-and-information/living-with-mental-illness/information-on-wellbeing-physical-health-bame-lgbtplus-and-studying-and-mental-health/severe-mental-illness-and-physical-health-checks

You can find out more information about:

- Bipolar disorder
- Psychosis
- Schizoaffective disorder
- Schizophrenia

at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheets.

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6. What can I do if I have any problems?

If you have problems with your GP or GP surgery, you could try the following options.

See a different GP at the surgery

You will have a named GP at the surgery you are registered with. They have overall responsibility for your care at the surgery, but you can see any GP who works there.²¹

You can ask at reception or look online to see if there is a GP with an interest or background in mental health. You could arrange an appointment with them.

Try to sort out the issue informally

You could try and sort the issue informally. This is often the quickest and easiest way to sort a problem.

Depending on the issue, you could talk to:

- your GP,
- the receptionist, or
- the practice manager.

You can explain:

- what's happened,
- why you aren't happy, and
- what you'd like to happen next.

If you still can't get the issue sorted out, you can then think about making a complaint.

Register with a new GP surgery

You can register with a new GP surgery. See [section 1](#) of this factsheet for information on how to find other GP surgeries local to you.

You do not need to tell your current GP surgery, or new GP surgery why you want to change.²²

Ask for changes to make using the service easier for you

The nature of your mental health issues might make it hard for you to use GP services. Like if you are very anxious, you might find it hard sitting in a busy waiting room before seeing a GP. But you might be comfortable waiting in a quieter side room.

You might find an aspect of using GP services difficult because of your mental health issues. You can ask them to change what they do, and they might agree to it. As long as your request is reasonable.

Other examples of things you could ask for are shown below.

- Some surgeries say you must phone early in the morning to book an appointment. You may find it hard to get up early because of the effect your medication. You could ask to book your appointment later in the day or a different way.
- Appointment reminders by text if you think you might forget your appointment because of your condition.

- A double appointment.
- An appointment by phone or video call.

But reasonable changes that you might want to request are individual to you. They could be anything, as long as they are reasonable.

You might have a mental health condition that means you have a disability as defined under the Equality Act 2010. If you do, your GP surgery has a legal obligation to make any reasonable adjustments that you request.²³

The Equality Act says that you have a disability if:²⁴

- you have a physical or mental impairment, and
- it has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on your ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

You can read more about reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act on Citizens Advice website:

www.citizensadvice.org.uk/law-and-courts/discrimination/check-what-type-of-discrimination-youve-experienced/duty-to-make-reasonable-adjustments-for-disabled-people

Get help from an advocate

You might be able to get an advocate to help you if you are having problems with your GP.

An advocate might be able to give you advice, go to appointments with you and help you get your voice heard.

They are independent from the NHS and are free to use.

There are 2 different types of advocates that might be able to help you.

General advocacy

A general advocate might be able to support you to get your GP to listen to your concerns. And help you to get the treatment that you would like. But they can't help if you want to make a formal complaint.

General advocacy may not always be available in your area.

The help you can get depends on what service offer. This can vary from service to service.

NHS complaints advocacy

You can contact an NHS complaints advocacy service if you need help to complaint about your GP or GP surgery.

This advocacy service is available in every area.

How can I find advocacy services?

You can find out how to find advocacy services in our information about **'Advocacy for mental health – Making your voice heard.'**

You can find out more information about **'Advocacy for mental health – Making your voice heard'** at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheets.

Contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS is part of the NHS. They give information and support to patients. They can sometimes sort issues without needing to go through the formal complaints procedure.

You can find your local PALS' details through this link:
[www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Patient-advice-and-liaison-services-\(PALS\)/LocationSearch/363](http://www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Patient-advice-and-liaison-services-(PALS)/LocationSearch/363).

Make a complaint

To your GP surgery or NHS England

If you can't sort your problem, you can make a complaint.

You can complain verbally or in writing. You can complain to the GP surgery itself or NHS England.

You can ask the surgery for a copy of their complaints policy.

You can find out more information about **'Complaining about the NHS or social services'** at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheets.

Make a complaint to the General Medical Council GMC²⁵

You can contact the GMC if you think your GP should be investigated for at least one of the following reasons.

- Serious or repeated mistakes in patient care.
- Abuse of professional position, such as, an improper sexual relationship with a patient.
- Violence, indecency, or sexual assault.
- A serious criminal offence.
- Discrimination against patients, colleagues or others.
- Fraud or dishonesty.
- If their health affects their practice or conduct.
- If you have serious concerns about their ability to communicate in English.

The GMC will not be able to make your GP apologise or give you different treatment. But they will investigate your concerns and take any appropriate actions.

The GMC details are in the [Useful contacts](#) section at the end of this factsheet.

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7. What can I do if I'm banned from my GP surgery?

NHS Regulations allow a GP practice to immediately remove you from their list following any incident where: ²⁶

- a GP or member of practice staff has feared for their safety or wellbeing, and
- it resulted in the incident being reported to the police.

I want my existing practice to have me as a patient. What can I do?

If you want to still be treated by your existing practice, you can contact them to:

- apologise for the behaviour that led to them banning you,
- ask them to take you back as a patient, and
- say that you are willing to agree a 'contract of behaviour.'

The contract of behaviour would be a written agreement between you and the GP surgery. It says what rules you need to follow and what behaviour is expected from you.

Your GP surgery may not agree to take you back on the above basis, but it might be worth a try.

What if my existing practice won't take me back?

If the practice won't take you back, you can try to register with a different GP practice. You can search for practices in your local area here: www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-GP.

If you are struggling to get accepted by a local GP practice, you can contact your local NHS Trust. You can search for your nearest NHS trust online. They can find you a GP to register with.

You might be told you've been allocated a specific GP practice under the NHS special allocation scheme.

What is the NHS special allocation scheme?²⁷

The scheme makes sure that patients who've been banned from a practice can continue to access healthcare at a specific GP practice.

NHS England has a responsibility to make sure that:

- all patients can access good quality GP services, and
- patients aren't refused healthcare following incidents that are reported to the police.

If you've been referred to the scheme, you should be sent a letter telling you this.

You can read more about the NHS special allocation scheme here: www.england.nhs.uk/contact-us/privacy-notice/how-we-use-your-information/safety-and-quality/if-you-are-a-patient-assigned-to-the-special-allocation-scheme.

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8. What if I need urgent help for my mental health?

If you need urgent help for your mental health, you can do the following.

- **Contact your local NHS urgent mental health helpline.** You can find details of your local NHS urgent mental health helpline at: www.nhs.uk/service-search/mental-health/find-an-urgent-mental-health-helpline. Or you can call NHS 111 to ask them for details.
- **Ask your GP for an emergency appointment.** GPs usually keep a few appointments free for urgent cases. Your GP can make a referral to your local NHS crisis team if necessary or refer you for other help.
- **Go to the accident and emergency (A&E)** of the local hospital. A&E will assess the situation and may arrange for a duty mental health professional to see you. You could get admitted to a mental health ward in hospital, be referred to your local NHS crisis team or referred for other help.
- **You can call the emergency services on 999** if you cannot get to A&E. They may then get in touch with NHS mental health services such as the crisis team or take you to A&E.
- **You can contact NHS 111.** The phone line is for when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. You can call 111 if you don't know who to call or you don't have a GP. Or if you need health information or reassurance about what to do next.
- **Use Shout text service:** You can text Shout to 85258 to connect to a trained person to help you. See <https://giveusashout.org> for more information.

You can find out more information about:

- Suicidal thoughts – How to cope, and
- Self-harm

At www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheets.

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9. Information for loved ones and carers.

You might be a loved one or carer of someone who is experiencing mental health issues. You might be worried about your loved one, especially if they won't agree to get help.

You can share your concerns with your relative's GP. GPs are allowed to listen to your concerns. This is not a breach of confidentiality.²⁸

Listening to you might help the GP think about what care your loved one needs. But they might need to tell your loved one that they have listened to your concerns. Especially if it has influenced their assessment and treatment of them.²⁹

They will not normally be able to share information with you unless your loved one has told them they can.

You can find more about '**Confidentiality, information and your loved one - For loved ones of people living with mental illness**' at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

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Useful Contacts

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)

NICE produce guidance for the NHS on how to treat certain mental health conditions. You can download these for free from the NICE website.

Telephone: 0300 323 0140

Address: 2nd Floor, 2 Redman Place, London E20 1JQ

Email: nice@nice.org.uk

Website: www.nice.org.uk

NHS

You can use this website to search for GP surgeries, hospitals, or walk-in centres in your area.

Website: www.nhs.uk/service-search/other-services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

You can contact your local PALS service if you are having a problem with your GP, or GP surgery. You can search for your local PALS using the website below.

Website: [www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Patient-advice-and-liaison-services-\(PALS\)/LocationSearch/363](http://www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Patient-advice-and-liaison-services-(PALS)/LocationSearch/363)

General Medical Council (GMC)

You can complain to the GMC about your GP if you think that your doctor needs to be investigated.

Telephone: 0161 923 6602

Email: gmc@gmc-uk.org

Website: www.gmc-uk.org/index.asp

Appointment Planner

Date of appointment: _____

Time of appointment: _____

Longer appointment needed? ☐ Yes ☐ No

How am I feeling?

Mood diary

Mood diary – Use this to record how you feel over the course of a few days or a fortnight

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10	Day 11	Day 12	Day 13	Day 14
😊														
😐														
😞														

What would I like from the appointment?

Medication I'm taking:

Am I experiencing side effects from any medication?

- ☐ No
☐ Yes (What are these?)

Would I like to change my medication?

- ☐ No
☐ Yes

References

- ¹ NHS. *How to register with a GP practice*. www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/AboutNHSservices/doctors/Pages/NHSGPs.aspx (Accessed 2nd May 2023).
- ² NHS. *Registering with a GP surgery outside your local area*. www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/gps/registering-with-a-gp-outside-your-area/ (Accessed 2nd May 2023).
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