Seeing an allied health professional

Summary

- Allied health professionals help in your recovery following illness or injury or help you manage a chronic condition.
- Some allied health professionals include dietitians, physiotherapists, podiatrists, speech pathologists and psychologists.
- Allied health professionals work in aged-care facilities, hospitals, rehabilitation services, community health centres, medical clinics and private practices.
- Usually, you can't claim your visits to an allied health professional through Medicare.

Allied health professionals are university-trained health practitioners who work as part of your healthcare team, to help in your recovery following illness or injury, or to manage a chronic health condition. They also help you improve your quality of life and to care for yourself.

There are many types of allied health professionals, including dietitians, physiotherapists, podiatrists, speech pathologists and psychologists.

Doctors, nurses and dentists (and other oral health professionals) are not allied health professionals. Most allied health professions are regulated by and registered with a national body or through the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA).

Types of allied health professionals

Some of the most common allied health professionals include:

- audiologists
- chiropractors
- dietitians
- exercise physiologists
- genetic counsellors
- myotherapists
- music and play therapists
- occupational therapists
- orthoptists
- orthotists and prosthetists
- osteopaths
- pharmacists
- physiotherapists
- podiatrists
- psychologists
- radiographer (or medical imaging technologist)
- social workers
- sonographers
- speech pathologists.
Paying for allied health services

Allied health services are generally not covered by Medicare, but there are some exceptions, such as:
If you have a chronic health condition or have complex care needs, you may be eligible for Medicare rebates on some treatments if your local doctor has created a care plan for you.

Some community health centres and public hospitals offer free or low-cost allied health services, although you may have to wait some time for an appointment.

Some allied health services may also be partly covered by your private health insurance. Check your policy or speak with your health insurance company about what services you are covered for. There is often a limit on how many visits you can claim in a year.

Finding an allied health professional

Allied health professionals work in many places, including aged-care facilities, hospitals, rehabilitation services, community health centres, medical clinics and private practices.

As a first step, it’s a good idea to speak with your local doctor about your healthcare needs, because they may be able to suggest an allied health professional who could help you.

Preparing for your allied health visit

Allied health services cover a wide variety of therapies, from talking therapies such as counselling to movement therapies such as physiotherapy. Because of this, what you need to do to prepare for your visit will vary.

As a general guide, consider:

- keeping track of your symptoms, including when they started, how long they lasted and what you were doing when they started. Your symptoms may be related to a particular activity or movement. Think also about what has made you feel better in the past, such as lying down or avoiding certain foods
- bringing a notebook containing:
  - a list of any questions you have
  - a list of any medication or supplements you are taking
  - any medical procedures such as surgeries or tests that you have had in the past, even if you may think it is not related to your current condition using this notebook during your sessions to write down any instructions or tips from the allied health professional
- thinking about whether you would like to have a friend or family member with you at your appointment. They may think of questions that you haven’t and can help you remember any instructions after the visit.

You can phone the allied health professional or their clinic to ask what else you can do to prepare for your visit.

Talking with your allied health professional

As with any healthcare consultation, you can expect that your allied health professional will ask about your symptoms and medical history.

They will probably ask about what therapies and treatments you have tried for the current problem. You may be asked to write your medical history down before your first appointment.

Questions you may wish to ask your allied health professional during your consultation include:

- How does the treatment work?
- Will the treatment affect other treatment I am having, or any medication or supplements I am taking?
- Are there any side effects? If so, what are they?
- How long will I need the treatment?
- How much does the treatment cost?
- Is there anything I can do at home to help the treatment?
Where to get help

- Your GP
- Community health centre
- Allied health professional

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