
Coordinating hospital appointments

Summary

- Your doctor is usually the person who recommends that you go to hospital for appointments when you have a health problem.
 - Follow your doctor's instructions on the best way to communicate about appointments with the hospital.
 - The hospital will send you a letter, email or text message telling you when to come and how to get ready for your appointments.
 - If you need a lot of appointments, it helps to keep good records of where and when to go, and how you need to prepare for each appointment.
 - It is important to go to all your appointments, even if you start to feel better.
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Coordinating your hospital appointments successfully will make sure the process of diagnosis, treatment and recovery, or living with medical issues runs as smoothly as possible.

Making hospital appointments

In most cases, your appointment at a hospital will happen through a referral from your local doctor. This may be because they feel your medical problem needs the attention of a specialist – a doctor who is an expert in your condition or health problem.

Your doctor will often give you a letter of referral to take to the specialist at your first appointment, but sometimes, they will send it directly to the specialist by fax or email. This letter explains who you are and why the doctor has suggested you see a specialist.

You may need to call the specialist's clinic or private rooms to make your appointment, or they may prefer to contact you. Follow your doctor's advice about contacting them. If you need an interpreter to help at the appointment, check that your doctor has let the specialist know this.

Sometimes an interpreter may not be available in the specialist's rooms, so arrangements to have an interpreter will need to be made before you go in. All public hospitals must provide you with an interpreter if you need one. You can also ask the specialist clinic how long the appointment is likely to take.

Preparing for your appointments

The specialist clinic will usually send you a letter, email or text confirming the date and time of your appointment and telling you what to bring with you.

You might need to be at the hospital for a while, so make sure you leave enough space in your day to allow for this. Plan your transport well ahead and make sure you leave enough time to get to the hospital and to find parking if you are travelling by private car.

If you need to change or cancel your appointment, try to give the hospital as much notice as possible, so they can give your appointment to someone else.

Coordinating multiple appointments

During your appointment, your specialist may ask you to have some tests (such as a blood test or CT scan), so they can get a better idea of your medical problem. The specialist will give you a referral for these tests or scans. You may be able to have them on the same day or you may have to come back if an appointment is not available. Check if you need to fast (not eat or drink) before any of these tests.

Your specialist will probably ask you to make another appointment to talk about the results of these tests or scans

and to book you in for surgery if you need it. Check that the results of your tests will be available in time for your next appointment.

If you are seeing more than one doctor about your health problem (or other health problems), make sure you tell each doctor about your other appointments.

Advice for people with complex or chronic conditions

People living with complex or chronic health conditions often need to have many appointments with different healthcare professionals at a number of hospitals or other healthcare services. This can take up a lot of time and needs good planning. Sometimes, a health condition can limit a person's physical abilities, making it difficult or tiring to get around.

Appointments often have to be timed in the right way, such as when your test results will be available.

If you are juggling appointments with different doctors and healthcare professionals, you may want to:

- write down all your appointments in one diary or use the electronic diary in your mobile phone so you have everything recorded in one place.
- carry a notebook containing the names of your healthcare professionals, what their role in your healthcare is and any questions you want to ask the next time you see them.
- keep copies of your test results and information about your treatments in a single folder that you can take with you to your appointments so your doctors have all the information they need to help you.

Your doctors will not share all the medical information about your care unless you give them permission.

After a hospital stay

Many people still need appointments after their hospital stay. These appointments are usually for monitoring or rehabilitation purposes. Even if you are feeling better, it is important to keep these appointments so your doctor can check your progress and recovery.

Continue to keep good records about your treatment and care after you leave hospital. You never know when you might need them again.

Where to get help

- Your hospital

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