Making and managing health and medical appointments

Summary

- Most healthcare appointments need to be made at least the day before.
- Ask for a longer appointment if you think you will need more time.
- Ask for a language interpreter or an AUSLAN service if required.
- Let the healthcare service know of any preferences you have — such as if you would like to see a female doctor.
- Ask if there is anything you need to bring with you (such as x-rays) or that you should do to prepare (such as fasting).
- If you are having multiple tests, find out if you need to have them in a particular order, so that you can book them that way.

Planning for a successful visit to a healthcare professional (such as a doctor, specialist, physiotherapist, or complementary medicine provider) starts from the moment you make your appointment.

Plan and prepare for your healthcare appointment by:

- booking the appointment as soon as you can
- preparing a list of your current symptoms, medicines and other treatments
- wearing clothing that can be easily removed if required
- asking for a female or male doctor, or a translator if you need one
- asking about parking or public transport options
- enquiring about wheelchair access if you require it
- asking a friend or relative to accompany you if you feel you need support or someone to take notes.

Booking a health or medical appointment

To visit most healthcare professionals, you need to make an appointment. If you arrive without a booking, they may not be available to see you, or you may have to wait a long time to be treated.

If you need an appointment on the same day, call early to see if your healthcare professional can fit you in. If your regular healthcare professional isn’t available, ask the office for a recommendation to another health service that can help with your issues. Sometimes, a medical centre will have another doctor who you could see. If you make your appointment early, you will have a better chance of seeing the healthcare professional of your choice.

Many health services have online booking. You can often see when your healthcare professional or other healthcare professionals at the health service are available. However, if there are no available appointments and you need to see a doctor, phone the health service.

Not all appointments are urgent. You can make appointments in advance for problems such as:

- regular treatments by a physical therapist
- refills of prescription medicines (organise well before you run out of medication)
- appointments to follow up on test results
- regular health checks.

If you need to see a medical specialist, you usually need a letter of referral from your local doctor before you can make the appointment. Specialist appointments sometimes need to be booked months in advance.

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If you are experiencing severe pain or distress, call triple 000.

**Seeing a doctor (general practitioner or GP)**

When you first call your doctor to make an appointment, you will speak to a receptionist. Making a doctor’s appointment is usually straightforward. A standard appointment is 10 to 15 minutes long. If you think you may need more time, ask the receptionist to book you a longer appointment.

If you are making an appointment for yourself or someone you care for, let the receptionist know if you need an immediate appointment, or if it can be scheduled later in the week. If you feel that your medical need is urgent, let the receptionist know that it is serious.

**Seeing a specialist, allied health or complementary medicine practitioner**

Before making an appointment with a specialist or other healthcare professional, write down a list of questions to ask the receptionist. These may include:

- What do I need to bring?
- Do I need to prepare anything or wear easily removed clothing?
- Is the appointment bulk-billed, or how much will I have to pay?
- How long should the appointment take? How long is the usual wait until seeing the specialist?
- Is car parking available, or what are the public transport options?

You will need a referral from your doctor to see a specialist, and for some allied health professions, such as psychologists, to be eligible for a Medicare rebate. Complementary medicine practitioners may not be covered by government schemes such as Medicare.

**Appointments for tests or treatment**

If you make an appointment for tests, treatment or procedures, you may like to ask to ask your doctor:

- Is there anything I should do to prepare, such as fasting?
- How much time should I allow for the test or procedure?
- How long until my results are available?
- Will you send the results to my doctor?
- Do I need someone to take me home after the test or procedure?
- Will I be able to drive after the procedure?

**Managing multiple appointments**

During your appointment, your doctor may recommend that you have further treatment, tests or procedures. Often, this means that your doctor will give you a referral to see a specialist or other healthcare professional. You then need to make further health appointments. It may be important that you make these extra appointments in the right order. Check this with your doctor.

Your doctor may want you to come back for another appointment to talk about your results, outcomes and any ongoing treatment. Make this appointment once you know when your results will be available.

If you are seeing several healthcare professionals, tell each of them about the others and give them permission to share any information, treatment recommendations and outcomes.

**Cancelling or rescheduling medical appointments**

Some doctors, specialists or other health professionals may charge a cancellation fee if you do not turn up for an appointment. Cancel and reschedule an appointment as soon as you know that you are not able to make it.

**Tips for managing appointments**

Some tips to help you make and manage your medical appointments include:

- You can take a friend or family member with you for support, to talk on your behalf, or to write down any
important information.

- If you are worried about waiting a long time for your appointment, ask for one of the first appointments of the day.
- Before you leave for your appointment, call to ask if your doctor, specialist or other healthcare professional is running late. If they are, you may be able to arrive later without losing your booking.

Where to get help

- Your GP
- Healthcare professional
- NURSE-ON-CALL 1300 60 60 24 – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)

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