Visiting the Doctor



Introduction

You might have some questions about visiting a doctor. What do I need to bring? Which doctor or health service can I go to? What do I tell the doctor? Will my parents find out? We have some information that can help you take the first steps to getting help.

Booking your appointment

There are a few different ways you can book appointments with the doctor (General Practitioner or GP):

- Walk-in. Some health services allow walk-in services (where you don't need an appointment), where the doctor (GP) will see you in the order of

when patients arrive (the doctor will see those who arrive first). Healthdirect GP Finder can help you to find a doctor (GP) or healthcare office near you.
- Book online. Some doctors offices allow you to book online. Check the websites of the doctors' offices near you to use this function or try searching HotDoc.
- Over the phone. You can call the doctors office to make an appointment.
- If the reason for seeing a GP is urgent and you want to see the GP on the same day, make sure you ring first thing in the morning as urgent bookings are on a first come first served basis.

During the booking, you will need to provide your contact information, like your name, phone number, medicare card details, etc.

> *Sometimes the reception staff may ask what the appointment is about to help them plan how long you will need or how quickly you need to be seen. You only need to give general information to the reception staff.*

You can also ask about the cost or if the service bulk bills. Sometimes this information will be available when you book online.

Before your appointment

When you get to the doctors office for your appointment, check in with the front desk or reception to let them know you have arrived.

You will usually need to:

- Tell them your name and, if you know, the name of the doctor you are seeing.
- Give them your Medicare card or number if you have one.
- If you are at a walk-in medical clinic (where you don't need an appointment), ask to see the next available doctor and how long the waiting time will be.
- Let them know if you have any needs – like if you need an interpreter or support person or you would like to know more about confidentiality at this

health service.

New Patient forms

If it is the first time you have visited the health service, they will give you a 'new patient' form to complete.

If you need help to fill out the form or if there are any codes or words that you don't understand on the form, just ask the reception staff and they can help you.

Each health service asks different questions, but they will most likely ask:

- Some details about you (for example, your name, contact details, sex and/or gender, age, if you are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin, and sometimes the language you speak a home)
- Your emergency contact details (this could be a parent or a friend. Don't worry, they won't be contacted unless there is an emergency.)
- If your gender identity is different than the gender you were assigned when you were born it's a good idea to write your gender and preferred pronouns on the form. If there is not a specific place for this find somewhere to write it and point it out to the receptionist to help them and the doctor and clinic staff to refer to you in the correct way.
- Some information about your medical history or medicine you might be taking. Visit the Your rights at the doctor topic for more information on confidentiality.

When you have filled out the form, hand it back to the person who gave it to you.

You will usually need to wait in the waiting area. Your name will be called when your doctor is available.

If you are worried you won't be able to hear when your name is called out, let the health service know and they will keep an eye out for you.

During your first appointment

The first appointment is a good opportunity to get to know the doctor. Your doctor should be someone you can talk to and trust.

> *Remember, you can always bring someone you trust like a friend or family member with you when seeing the doctor/health worker if you feel uncomfortable going by yourself.*

If you feel comfortable with and trust the doctor, it's a good idea to stay with the same doctor. Visiting the same doctor means that the doctor can get to know you better and therefore will have a better understanding of your health needs.

Sometimes the doctor will ask you questions about things you might not want to talk about. It's okay to ask the doctor why they are asking a question and to tell them if you don't feel comfortable answering.

Some topics the doctor might ask you about are:

- Mental health (moods and feelings)
- Drugs, alcohol or smoking use
- Sexual health
- Past trauma (stressful events experienced)
- Sexuality and gender
- Family, culture/religion

Visit the Your rights at the doctor topic for more information about confidentiality.

After your appointment

After you have visited the doctor there might be some things for you to do:

- Book any 'follow up' appointments the doctor has suggested.
- Get any tests done that the doctor has suggested by booking appointments at the relevant health services (such as a specialist -you will need a referral or letter from the GP for this).
- Get any prescriptions the doctor has suggested by visiting your local pharmacy or any pharmacy that is convenient to you.

A follow up appointment is a second appointment with the same doctor to get test results or to check with the doctor to see if a treatment is working. If the doctor

has asked you to book a follow up appointment you can do this at the reception before you leave the doctor's office.

Good experience at the doctors

Every doctor is different and your experience in the appointment might feel good or bad, or somewhere in between.

A good experience when you leave an appointment might feel like:

- You can talk to and you trust the doctor.
- The doctor has listened to you carefully, understood your health issues and has explained everything to you.
- The doctor has spoken to you clearly and that you understand what is going on and what you need to do next.
- The doctor shows respect for you as a person and takes your concerns seriously.

The above dot points will help you work out what you need when you next visit a health service.

> *When you have had a good experience at the doctors or health service, try thinking about what they did that you liked.*

Tips to remember the doctor's advice:

- Record what the doctor says. You could make notes or ask the doctor if you can make a voice recording.
- You can ask the doctor to explain any medical words that you don't know.
- You can also talk to a youth worker or health worker that you trust to learn more about the medical words you didn't understand.
- You can go to a different doctor for a second opinion if you felt uncomfortable with what the doctor has said or the treatment they recommended.

Bad experience at the doctors

If you have a negative experience at the doctor or a health service, try to work out why this experience was bad for you.

You can always go to a different doctor if you do not feel comfortable with the doctor you saw.

A bad experience might feel like:

- The doctor was not listening to you or did not show you respect
- The doctor did not give you clear explanations about what they thought might be going on, or explain the medical words they used
- The doctor made you feel uncomfortable about something personal
- The appointment was short and felt rushed.

If you have had a bad experience and want to do something about it, you have options. You can:

- Talk about the experience with someone you trust or with a youth worker
- Speak to someone at the service and tell them how and why you had a bad experience
- Ask to talk to the health service's manager about your experience
- Provide feedback through the health service's feedback form
- Call or email the health service and explain how and why this visit was a bad experience for you
- If you are not happy with the outcome, and would like to make a formal complaint you may contact the Health Care Complaints Commission. You can download a form online here. If you need help doing this speak to a youth worker or youth service near you. This could be a school counsellor, someone at a service like headspace, youth health services or the local youth services group.

Learn more about Your Rights at the Doctor.

Common tests at a doctor’s appointment

In your appointment, there might be some things that the doctor wants to look at to find out more about your health.

These tests or examinations can help the doctor understand what is causing you to feel sick, injured, or unwell.

The following tests or examinations are common:

- **Physical examination:** This is when a doctor looks at your body. The doctor might ask you to move certain parts of your body such as your arms, legs or neck. The doctor may also touch your body to look for signs of illness – for example they might use a stethoscope to listen to your heart or breathing, or inspect your abdomen or stomach, or look inside your ears or throat. They do this to look for signs of any illness that might be related to the symptoms you are concerned about.
- **Growth examination:** The doctor might do a growth check to help track how much you are growing. To do this, the doctor will measure your height and weight and use this to calculate your body mass index (BMI). They will then use this number to see how you are growing compared with other people of a similar age and sex to you.
- **Mental health plan:** If you would like a mental health plan, the doctor will need to ask you questions about your thoughts and feelings. It’s good to book a longer appointment if you want a mental health plan as they can take a bit more time. Having a mental health plan makes seeing a psychologist cheaper because you have a Medicare discount.
- **Blood test/pathology test:** This is when a doctor or nurse takes a small amount of your blood using a needle so it can be tested. Sometimes a doctor will give you a form to take to the pathology lab to have your blood taken. Specific blood tests can help the doctor work out if you have an illness.
- **Sensitive or private examinations:** This includes any type of examination that the doctor or nurse would do on areas of your body that are private or sensitive. This can include genital or vaginal examination, taking a swab from your genital area, or feeling for a lump on your breast. The doctor should always ask for consent before touching you and should

only touch parts of your body that are required to help them diagnose an illness. You can always ask the doctor to explain these examinations if you would like to know more before you agree to them. You can also ask for a support person, like the nurse, to be present.

Prescriptions / scripts & referrals to specialists

Prescriptions/scripts for medicines

Certain medicines can only be obtained if you have a prescription/script from a doctor.

A prescription (often called a script) is a paper document that the doctor gives you to take to a chemist or pharmacy for a medicine. You may also be given an electronic prescription which is a digital version of a paper prescription.

Learn about the benefits of electronic prescriptions and how they work.

At the pharmacy, you give the prescription to a person working in the pharmacy, usually someone called a pharmacist (a health professional who specialises in medicines). The pharmacist then gets the medicine according to the prescription ready for you.

Sometimes, the pharmacist may ask you questions, because they need to carefully check the prescription to make sure the medicine is correct and that it is safe for you.

For example, they will make sure that the prescribed medicine doesn't interact (have any problem) with any other medicines you may be taking.

> *The pharmacist may offer you a choice on your prescription. This is because different brands make the same medicines. You can ask for the cheapest one or for a specific brand.*

Let your doctor know as soon as possible if you experience any side effects from the medicine. Common side effects for a lot of medicines include:

- Headaches
- Weight gain
- Feeling sick in the stomach

If you are worried about the cost of the medicine, ask the doctor or pharmacist about cheaper options.

You should show the pharmacist your Medicare card. If you have a Health Care Card, always show your card at the pharmacy to receive cheaper medicines. For more information on how to get a Health Care Card go to the Medicare page.

Referrals to specialists

Sometimes your doctor may refer you to a specialist if you need more tests or treatment, for example for heart problems you might go to a cardiologist (heart specialist).

To see a specialist, you must have a referral letter from your doctor (GP) or another health professional (a referral is a written document from one health professional to another health professional that asks them to see you).

You must book an appointment to see a specialist. It is important that you take the referral letter to the appointment with you.

Most specialists do not bulk bill, but some will bulk bill people with Health Care Cards.

If your GP wants to refer you to a specialist, ask your GP how much it will cost to see the specialist.

If it costs too much, ask for an alternative, such as a public hospital clinic. You may have to wait longer but it is generally free if you have a Medicare card.