

East Lothian Health & Social Care Partnership



Referral to hospital

A guide to referral and waiting times

This information sheet tells you about what happens when your doctor makes a hospital referral for you. It covers waiting times, changing appointments and who to contact for more information.

Making a referral

If the doctor is referring you to hospital, she or he will contact the relevant hospital department shortly after they have seen you. At this point, it is really important to make sure that the practice has your current address and phone number, so that we can pass on the correct details to the hospital.

From this point onwards, the hospital will be dealing directly with you, usually by letter. Make sure you ask your doctor which department and which hospital you are being referred to in case you need to get in touch with them later on.

Waiting times

The hospital department will try to make your waiting time as short as possible. The length of time you have to wait will depend on your condition and the level of demand for the service.

You should receive an appointment letter or a letter asking you to phone for an appointment within 16 weeks of being referred. Unfortunately, many hospital departments are experiencing high levels of demand which makes it difficult for them to see people within 16 weeks.

They will send you an appointment as soon as they can. Most people start treatment within 18 weeks of the initial referral.

Your appointment

You should be given seven days notice of your appointment.

What to do if you can't make your appointment

Please contact the department, using the phone number on your appointment letter, as soon as you can. Then they can give your appointment to someone else and agree a more suitable time with you.

Turning down appointments

Please remember that if you turn down two reasonable offers of appointment, the hospital may send you back to your GP and your waiting time will start again.

Going on holiday?

If you are waiting to hear about an appointment and you are about to go on holiday, please let the hospital know when you will be away. This allows them to make sure they don't send you an appointment for while you are on holiday. Again, use the contact details on your appointment letter.

Worried about how to get to your appointment?

If you need more information about anything to do with your appointment—for example, how to find the department,

transport, access—please phone the hospital using the phone number in your appointment letter.

What to do if the hospital doesn't get in touch after 16 to 18 weeks

You can phone the hospital department concerned to see what's happening with your referral. Here are some useful contact numbers:

- Eye Pavilion—0131 536 3920
- Lauriston Buildings—0131 536 1000
- Roodlands Hospital—0131 536 8300
- Herdmanflat Hospital—0131 536 8300
- Royal Hospital for Sick Children—0131 536 0000
- Royal Infirmary, Little France—0131 536 1000
- St John's, Livingston—01506 523 000
- Western General Hospital—0131 537 1000.

These are general switchboard numbers so you will need to tell the operator which department you were referred to, for example, orthopaedics, urology, cardiology etc.

Please avoid making an appointment with your GP about your referral unless your condition changes. Our reception staff can deal with queries but it is normally best to enquire about the progress of your referral with the hospital department directly.

Waiting-time guarantees

The Scottish Government has established different 'Waiting-Time Guarantees' which set out how long waiting-times should be for a range of activities, for example:

- your first appointment at Outpatients
- tests like endoscopy, CT scan and ultrasound
- treatments, for example, an operation.

How to make a comment, suggestion or complaint

We welcome all feedback on patients' experiences of our services and use it to drive improvements. You can give your feedback to us at the surgery or use our Patient Experience Service.

If you would like to **make a complaint** about the service that you have received, please contact the NHS Lothian Patient Experience Team. You can do this via a number of routes, including:

- In writing
- By telephone
- By email
- Face to face

Contact us at:

Waverley Gate, 2 – 4 Waterloo Place.

Edinburgh EH1 3EG

Telephone: 0131 536 3370

Email: feedback@nhslothian.scot.nhs.uk

Thank you very much.