Hospital waiting times: how quickly you should get hospital care

How long will I have to wait for hospital treatment?

- We will try to make your wait as short as possible.
- Your GP will let you know how long you have to wait.
- We will always try to let you know at least 7 days before your appointment.

The Government have set targets which say how quickly you should be able to get certain kinds of appointment, test or treatment.

Most patients should start hospital treatment within 18 weeks

- Any treatment you need should start within 18 weeks from when your GP refers you. If it takes a long time to decide what treatment you need it may not be possible to meet this target.
- If you need an appointment at the hospital, you should get this within 12 weeks. This is called the treatment time guarantee.

The Treatment Time Guarantee

- The law says that all patients have the right to start hospital treatment within 12 weeks of agreeing to the treatment.
- Health professionals must give you all the information you need to make the right decision about your treatment.
- Some treatments are not covered by the treatment time guarantee. Ask your GP about this.
What should I do if my treatment does not start within 12 weeks?
- You should contact the hospital straight away and tell them you have waited for more than 12 weeks.
- NHS hospitals have more than half a million patients each year, and sometimes mistakes are made.

If you have had to wait more than 12 weeks for treatment, the hospital must:
- offer you the next available appointment
- explain why you had to wait more than 12 weeks
- let you know what advice and support you can get
- tell you how to give feedback or make a complaint.

Giving you information

The NHS will write to tell you if your treatment is covered by the treatment time guarantee, and explain what will happen if you:
- refuse 2 or more appointments
- don’t attend your appointment
- cancel an appointment 3 times
- say you are unavailable for your appointment (because you are away on holiday, for example)
- have another medical problem that needs to be treated before you can keep your appointment (like high blood pressure).

The law also says that you must not wait more than 2 months for treatment of serious medical conditions, like cancer.

What can I do to help the NHS?
- Tell the hospital or clinic if you change your name, address or phone number. This is to make sure we can contact you.
- If your GP refers you for a hospital appointment, tell them about any days you cannot go to hospital.
- Be on time for appointments. If you are going to be late, phone and let us know.
• If you can’t keep an appointment, let the health services know as soon as possible

How can I find out more?

To find out more about anything in this factsheet, or to get The Charter of Patient Rights and Responsibilities, the Your health, your rights factsheets or other leaflets and factsheets listed below:

• ask a member of staff at GP and dental practices, hospitals and other places where you get NHS care
• call the NHS inform Helpline on 0800 22 44 88 (textphone 18001 0800 22 44 88; the helpline can provide an interpreting service). Lines are open every day from 8am to 10pm.
• visit www.nhsinform.co.uk or www.hris.org.uk
• contact the Patient Advice & Support Service (PASS) at your local citizens advice bureau

We have tried our best to make sure that the information in this factsheet is correct. However, this factsheet is for information only.