

# Changes to Appointments

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Thank you to all of our patients who have supported us so far during the pandemic and our vaccination programme. Our staff have been very grateful for your patience and co-operation.

We recognise that there are now significant pressures on the NHS system as a whole and have been doing our best to manage availability whilst struggling with the challenges posed by staff absence and a higher level of demand that we have seen even pre-pandemic.

We have undertaken a review of our appointment system in the hopes of reducing duplication, increasing availability and patient choice, whilst aiming to safeguard our vulnerable staff and patients.

From **Monday 6<sup>th</sup> September** we will make the following changes:

- Patients will be offered a choice of a telephone or a face-to-face appointment. We will no longer be mandating telephone-first, but will retain it in cases where patients report potential Covid-19 symptoms. It is therefore **very important** that you engage with our Patient Care Navigators when they ask for the reason for the appointment.
- We are increasing the amount of pre-bookable appointments we offer, and the variety. We will now offer a number of appointments that can be booked up to 2 weeks in advance, some 3 days in advance, some 2 days in advance and some 1 day in advance. We will also retain some same-day appointments for more urgent problems. We hope this will give patients more options for more routine problems and keep our same-day capacity open for urgent health issues. Appointments with certain clinicians – e.g. our physiotherapist or clinical pharmacist – are pre-bookable up to 4 weeks in advance.
- Appointments will revert back to specific times – unless informed otherwise by the Patient Care Navigator. This means if attending the surgery or awaiting a phone call, you will be given a specific time. Bear in mind sometimes the clinician can run late, but they will do their best to keep to time. If you fail to attend for an appointment at the surgery, you will need to rebook. For telephone appointments the clinician will make two attempts to call – if there is no answer after two attempts you will need to rebook.
- Our waiting room capacity will increase as seats will be kept at 1m apart. To protect other patients and staff we will ask everyone to continue to wear a mask and sanitise their hands on arrival. If you are exempt from mask-wearing, please consider whether you can manage to wear a mask whilst in the surgery for a short period. If you cannot, we may ask you to wait outside. Please think of the safety of others. If the waiting room becomes too full, again we may ask you to wait outside. It is therefore important that you arrive for your appointment on time, and not too early.
- We are taking a zero tolerance approach to abuse and aggression towards our staff. Patients who refuse to comply with our policies and procedures, or who demonstrate unacceptable behaviour to our staff or other patients in the practice may be removed from our list. We are all in this together and our staff have worked tirelessly to keep the surgery going. We are all under pressure, but nobody deserves to be the victim of abuse.

- Prescription requests will continue to be submitted in writing (via email, Patient Access or the NHS App) or dropped off at the surgery. We will not take requests over the phone. This is to minimise the chance of mistakes and also help keep the phone lines free for more urgent matters. If you take regular medication you can also ask your local pharmacy to order it in for you.
- We continue to ask patients not to call up for results before 2pm. We need to keep the lines free for appointments and results are not often looked at by the clinicians before lunchtime.
- When we are out of appointments for the day, unfortunately that means we are not able to book anymore in. We have an on-call GP working each day whose role is to support with medical emergencies – things like where intervention may prevent a hospital admission, where test results come back that need urgent action, for acutely unwell patients who need swift review. Our Patient Care Navigators take instructions from the GP's on how they book patients in – they do not make these decisions themselves. Please respect this when they inform you of what options we have available to help you.

Like every other practice in the country at the moment, we are incredibly busy and demand is very high. Please also consider whether your problem needs help from the surgery. Many conditions can be managed with self-care or over-the-counter medications. Your community pharmacy can help give advice and in some cases prescribe treatment. NHS 111 is a first-port-of-call service for help and advice if you're not sure who to see for a health problem. There is also help available from the Yate Minor Injuries Unit.

If you are chasing up a referral to the hospitals, be aware that there is a significant delay in appointments being made and very little the GP's can do to move appointments forward. If your symptoms haven't worsened, contact the hospital department for an update on their waiting list times. If your symptoms have worsened, book an appointment with the referring clinician to discuss them.

We hope that these changes will support increased patient access. However we may have to flex our system based on clinician's availability so please be aware that there may be occasions where we have to revert back to a same-day policy on days when we are short-staffed.

Your continued support and patience is much appreciated.



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