

Access your GP

A useful guide for Barnet residents

Register with your GP, access services,
and know your rights.



Contents

How can I find a GP?	3
Do I need to show ID?	4
What if I don't speak English?	5
Booking appointments	5
Referrals	6
Moving to a new GP	6
Can a pharmacy help?	7
When do I need a dentist?	7
Other ways of getting medical help	8
What is NHS 111?	8
Help on evenings and weekends	8
Barnet walk-in centres	8
Find your nearest A&E	9
Who can help me at my GP surgery?	9
Where can I get more information?	10
Patient Participation Groups	11
How to make a complaint	11

How can I find a GP?

If you have access to the internet, visit the NHS UK website nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-gp to find a GP. Put your postcode in the 'Find a GP' search box - this will give you a list of GPs in your area.

It will also give you some information, to help you decide which GP to choose:

- A 'star rating' from other patients
- Whether patients would recommend the GP surgery to others
- Whether there are male and female doctors at the GP surgery
- Most GPs also have google reviews, which you can find by typing the surgery's name into google

If you don't have access to the internet, you can call Healthwatch Barnet on 0203 475 1308 - we will do the search for you.

What to consider when choosing a GP?

It's a good idea to find three local GP surgeries and then choose between them.

If you have access to the internet, visit the websites of these surgeries. Most surgeries have a page on 'new patients' or 'registration', where you can check whether your address is in their 'catchment area' – the streets covered by the GP surgery.

If you don't have access to the internet, you can phone the GP surgery instead. You might also want to visit each surgery, meet the receptionist, ask about their services and have a look at the reception area.

You should also think about what you need from your GP, for example:

- Would you prefer to be seen by a female doctor?
- Does the surgery have a doctor, nurse, or other health professional with special knowledge of subjects that could help you? For example, this could be in areas like mental health, dementia, asthma or diabetes.

How do I register with a GP?

Once you have decided which surgery you want to join, you can apply to register with them.

If you have internet access, please check the GP surgery's website. Most surgeries will let you register online. This will save you time and also helps GP surgeries to spend less time on admin, and more on helping patients.

If it's difficult for you to register online, please phone the surgery to find out how to register. You may be asked to fill in a 'PRF1' form, which will ask for information including your:

- Name
- Date of birth
- Address, if you have one
- NHS number, if you know it
- The name and address of your last GP, if you had one

What if I am only visiting Barnet?

Are you visiting Barnet for more than 24 hours but less than 3 months? If you need to see a GP, you can apply to register as a temporary resident. You are entitled to the same treatment, free of charge.

Do I need to show ID?

When you apply to register with them, some GP surgeries will ask to see proof of address. If you have proof of address, it is helpful if you can provide this. But if you don't have proof of address, you still have the right to register with a GP surgery.

You do not need to show proof of immigration status to register with a GP surgery.

If a surgery says you can't register because you don't have proof of address or immigration status, you can:

- Ask to speak to the practice manager
- Ask to be registered on a temporary basis
- Try a different GP surgery
- Contact Doctors of the World for help with registering with a GP – you can call them for free on 0808 164 7686 - they are open 10am to 12 midday, Monday to Thursday – or email them at clinic@doctorsoftheworld.org.uk

If you are experiencing homelessness, you can also contact Homeless Action in Barnet on 0208 446 8400 or at hab@habcentre.org

Am I entitled to see a GP?



Everyone in the UK, regardless of their nationality or immigration status, can register with a GP for free.

What if I don't speak English?

If you don't speak English, or if you use British Sign Language, you are entitled to an interpreter. There will be no cost to you or the GP surgery. The interpreter can help you with registration and be there during your appointment. You should always have a professional interpreter for a medical appointment. The GP surgery should not ask you to bring a friend or family member to translate. When you book your appointment, you must tell the receptionist you need an interpreter – this is to make sure they have enough time to arrange it. You should also be given a longer appointment, so there is enough time for you to talk to the interpreter.

Some GP surgeries sign up to Doctors of the World's 'Safe Surgery' project, to make sure that if you can't speak English or don't have ID you can still get help from their surgery. Look for a 'Safe Surgery' badge on your GP's website, or ask at their reception.

Booking GP appointments

Every GP surgery has its own process for booking appointments, but you can find some general guidance on this below. If you have a complex health problem, you can ask your GP surgery whether it is possible for you to book a longer appointment.

Phone

- Many GP surgeries in Barnet receive hundreds of phone calls a day.
- If you don't have internet access, or have an urgent health problem, please do phone your GP surgery.
- However, if you have a non-urgent problem and can contact your GP surgery online, this might be quicker.

Online messaging

- All GP surgeries have online messaging - you can find this on their website, and send a message to ask for an appointment
- This may be switched on from 8am to 6.30pm Monday to Friday, but some surgeries may switch this off earlier, when capacity for the day is reached
- Check your GP surgery's website to see how fast they reply to online messaging
- Some surgeries reply the same day you message them – this works well if you need to be seen soon
- Other surgeries will take longer – this is ok if you have a non-urgent problem, but if they can't reply soon and you need help quickly, you should phone your GP
- GPs use different apps - usually either Accurx, eConsult or PATCHS

- These apps will ask you a series of questions, please give as much information as possible - your GP surgery needs this to give you the right help, including deciding whether you need an appointment, and when you need to be seen

NHS App & Patient Access

- Many GP surgeries also use the NHS App and Patient Access for online messaging
- On these apps, you can order repeat prescriptions and view your health records
- Some surgeries let you book certain non-urgent appointments for yourself, online, using these apps e.g. smear tests, vaccinations
- However, surgeries often ask patients to send a message requesting an appointment
- If the NHS App says no appointments are available, this might not be right – it often means you need to message asking for a non-urgent appointment

Email

- We don't recommend emailing your GP about medical issues
- This is not a route to request an appointment or convey clinical information
- Because of the number of messages they receive, many surgeries are not able to reply to emails quickly - this might mean a long delay before you hear back
- Messages sent through the NHS App, Patient Access, Accurx, eConsult or PATCHS (depending which apps your surgery uses) will be added to your other records - they are more likely to get a response
- GP surgeries won't allow you to book appointments or discuss clinical issues over email – this is because emails are checked by admin staff and not doctors

Referrals

Your GP may refer you for specialist help, for example to a hospital. After your referral, if you've waited a long time for your appointment, you should contact the hospital or service you were referred to, rather than your GP, to get an update.

You can also call the NHS e-Referral Service on 0345 608 8888 – they are open Monday to Friday from 8am to 8pm and on weekends and bank holidays from 8am to 4pm. After you see a specialist outside your GP surgery, if the specialist refers you for a test, the specialist (and not your GP) should contact you with the test results.

Moving to a new GP

You can move to a different GP surgery. You don't have to tell your old GP surgery why you are doing this. You will need to register with a new GP surgery. Then, they will ask your old GP surgery for your medical records and move these across.

Can a pharmacy help?

Your local pharmacy can help with many health problems. Since January 2024, as part of the Pharmacy First service, most pharmacies can supply prescription-only medicines without the need to visit a GP. They can do this for:

- Sore throats (adults and children aged 5 years and over)
- Uncomplicated urinary tract infections (women aged 16 to 64 years)
- Sinusitis (adults and children aged 12 years and over)
- Shingles (all adults aged 18 years and over)
- Infected insect bites (adults and children aged 1 year and over)
- Impetigo (adults and children aged 1 year and over)
- Earache – acute otitis media (children between 1 and 17 years)

Visit your local pharmacy to find out more.

If you are on a low income at the moment, you may be able to access free prescriptions, and some free non-prescription medicines – ask your GP for more information.

When do I need a dentist?



If you have toothache, bleeding gums, or need advice about looking after your teeth, you should see a dentist, not a doctor.

You can find a list of local dentists on the NHS UK website: nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-dentist

If you can't access the internet, you can phone Healthwatch Barnet on 0203 475 1308 - we will look on this website for you.

For emergency dental help, phone NHS 111.

Other ways of getting medical help

There are ways to get help when your GP surgery is closed, or if you can't get a GP appointment.

What is NHS 111?

NHS 111 is a FREE helpline – they can give you medical advice and direct you to the local service that can best help you. They are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year – just dial 111 from your landline or mobile phone. If you don't speak English, they can provide an interpreter.

You should call NHS 111 if:

- your GP surgery is closed, and you need help but it's not life threatening
- or if you don't have a GP

You can also access NHS 111 online at 111.nhs.uk or contact the British Sign Language service at signvideo.co.uk/nhs111/. The NHS 111 website will not give you a diagnosis, but it will direct you to the best place to get help for your symptoms.

Help on evenings and weekends

If you have an urgent problem, you can request an evening or weekend GP appointment. These are held across Barnet, so it may not be at your usual GP surgery. The appointments are on:

- Weekends and bank holidays - 8am to 8pm
- Monday to Friday - 6.30pm to 8pm

To book, you can ask your GP surgery, call NHS 111 (24 hours a day) or phone Barnet Federated GPs on 0203 948 6809 (evenings and weekends only).

Barnet walk-in and urgent treatment centres

In Barnet, there are two walk-in centres and one urgent treatment centre. Anyone can go to these for help with minor illnesses and injuries. There is no need for an appointment, you can drop in, but you will have to wait until they are ready to see you:

- **Edgware Walk-In Centre:** 8am to 8pm, seven days a week, last patient booking at 7pm - Edgware Community Hospital, Burnt Oak Broadway HA8 0AD
- **Finchley Walk-In Centre:** 8am to 8pm, seven days a week, last patient booking at 7pm - Finchley Memorial Hospital, Granville Road N12 0JE

- **Barnet Hospital Urgent Treatment Centre:** 8am to midnight, seven days a week; minor injuries are seen from 8am onwards and minor illnesses are seen by GPs, who start at 10am – Barnet Hospital, Wellhouse Lane EN5 3DJ

Find your nearest A&E

There is **no** Accident and Emergency (A&E) at Edgware Community Hospital or Finchley Memorial Hospital.

If your condition may be life-threatening – for example if you are experiencing chest pain or breathing difficulties, you should phone 999 or go to your nearest A&E. Here are some of the A&Es near Barnet:

- Barnet Hospital A&E, Wellhouse Lane EN5 3DJ
- Whittington Hospital A&E, Magdala Avenue N19 5NF
- Royal Free Hospital A&E, Pond Street NW3 2QG

Who can help me at my GP surgery?

Many GP surgeries have new staff roles, including social prescribers, care coordinators and advanced practitioners. You can find more about these below. Every surgery is different – for example, some will have physiotherapists working in their surgery, others may refer you to see a physiotherapist elsewhere.

What does a GP do?

Your General Practitioner (GP) can give you health advice and access to the medicines you need. GPs treat all common medical conditions. If you need to see a specialist, or to have urgent treatment for a serious condition, your GP can arrange this for you.

GPs can also help you look after your mental health. If you feel anxious, depressed or that you are not coping emotionally, you should make a GP appointment. They can tell you about different options that might help you feel better.

It's important to see a GP as soon as you notice a worrying symptom. The GP will arrange tests, if required, which may help spot a serious illness at an early stage. This will increase your chances of a full recovery. Your GP can also reassure you if there is nothing to worry about.

Receptionists

The receptionist is usually the first person you meet at your GP surgery. They are responsible for answering the phone and registering you. Some GP receptionists are being trained as Care Navigators. Their job is to ask you the right questions, so that you

get an appointment with the right team member, as quickly as possible. Part of a receptionist's role is to keep any information you share confidential.

Nurses

In GP surgeries, nurses provide vaccinations and injections. They carry out cervical smears and offer family planning and sexual health advice. They also assess symptoms and treat minor health problems, injuries and infections.

Healthcare assistants

You can see a healthcare assistant to get your height, weight or blood pressure checked. They can also give you information about healthy eating and lifestyles.

Advanced practitioners

Many GPs now have a range of advanced practitioners working in the surgery. These may include physiotherapists, clinical pharmacists, dietitians, occupational therapists, podiatrists and paramedics. Depending on your health needs, you may be given an appointment with one of these practitioners. They can help to assess and treat your health problems.

Care coordinators

Care coordinators can help you connect with different people across the health system. Who they connect you with will depend on your health needs. For example, this could include doctors, mental health practitioners, speech and language therapists or hospital teams. If you're getting help from a few different teams, care coordinators can keep this organised and linked up.

Social prescribers

Social prescribers can support you to improve your wellbeing. They can connect you to the right community groups and services. This can help with things like exercise, making new friends, housing, benefits, education or finding a job.

Physician associates

Physician associates are not doctors. They work in GP surgeries, are clinically trained and must be supervised by a specific GP. Physician associates can take your medical history, plan treatment, analyse test results and give you health advice. If you are not sure whether you are speaking to a GP or a physician associate, you can ask them.

Where can I get more information?

This document is only a brief guide – you can find lots more information on the website of the North Central London NHS Integrated Care Board: nclhealthandcare.org.uk/local-health/. This includes details on ways to access care, repeat prescriptions, test results, mental health support and more.

Patient Participation Groups

Anyone who wants to take a more active role in working with their GP surgery can apply to join the Patient Participation Group. Group members work with their GP surgery to make sure patients are listened to and the quality of care keeps improving. By joining a Patient Participation Group, you can learn more about your GP surgery and the staff team. You will be part of a group that can suggest positive ideas for the surgery and promote health education. Joining a Patient Participation Group is not the way to deal with your individual complaints.

If you want to join your local Patient Participation Group, and you have access to the internet, you should be able to find details of how to join on your GP surgery's website. If you don't have internet access, you can phone the surgery to ask about joining the group.

How to make a complaint

If you are not happy about the service you received from your GP surgery and would like to make a complaint, the first step is to speak to your GP surgery about this. It may be possible to resolve your concerns without having to make a formal complaint.

If you are unhappy with the response you receive, you can make a formal complaint to either your GP surgery or the NHS North Central London Integrated Care Board – their phone number is 0204 515 1448, and their email is nclicb.complaints@nhs.net. Please note, you will have to choose to complain to one or the other - if you make a formal complaint to your GP and the Integrated Care Board about the same problem, the Integrated Care Board will not respond.

After going through the formal complaints process, if you are still unhappy with the response you receive, you can complain to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman on 0345 015 4033. The Ombudsman will not look at your complaint unless you have already been through the complaints process with your GP and/or the North Central London Integrated Care Board.

Support with making a complaint

If you have tried to resolve the issue with your GP but this hasn't worked, you can contact Pohwer. They are a free, independent organisation. They can help you with writing letters, assist you with preparing for meetings, and can go with you to meetings. You can contact Pohwer by phone on 0300 456 2370 or email pohwer@pohwer.net.



www.healthwatchbarnet.co.uk

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