

# How long will I have to wait to see a consultant?

It depends on why you need to see the consultant.

## Emergency treatment

If you have chest pains and heart disease is suspected, you should be seen at a specialist (or rapid access) chest pain clinic within two weeks of being referred.

## Non-emergency treatment

For non-urgent matters, you have the right to start treatment within 18 weeks from the date your GP, dentist or other healthcare professional refers you (unless you want to wait longer or waiting longer is clinically right for you). This will be led by a consultant. Within the 18 weeks, you should have any tests, scans or other procedures that you need before treatment starts.

## Cancer

When cancer is suspected, you have the right to be seen by a specialist within two weeks from your referral date. Most people referred like this don't have cancer, but it's important to see a specialist as soon as possible, so that a cancer diagnosis can be confirmed or excluded.

If these time limits cannot be met, and you have a right, the NHS must take all reasonable steps to offer you a quicker appointment at another healthcare provider. You will have to ask for this to be done.

You should be given information on who will provide your care, in addition to waiting times for investigations and treatments.

## When the maximum waiting times for treatment don't apply

The right to treatment within 18 weeks from your referral date does not include maternity services or non-medical consultant-led mental health services.

There are also some exceptions where the right to treatment within 18 weeks does not apply.

Examples include if:

- you choose to wait longer
- there is a clinical or medical reason why you should wait longer

For more information about waiting times, including other exceptions, see [Choice in the NHS: waiting times](#).

## Consultant-led treatment

If your GP thinks you need a specialist opinion about your health condition, you will be referred to a consultant who specialises in that area of medicine. Examples of specialists include:

- a gynaecologist (specialist in women's reproductive health)
- a dermatologist (specialist in skin conditions)

The consultant will be responsible for your overall care, but won't always be present at each appointment.

### **Patient choice of hospital**

When you're referred for your first outpatient appointment, you may be able to choose where you have your consultant-led treatment. You will be given an outpatient appointment to see the consultant at a hospital, but you won't have to stay overnight.

Waiting times may vary between hospitals. Your choice of hospital may depend on a range of factors, including:

- your GP's recommendation
- how soon you need to start treatment
- whether the hospital specialises in a specific treatment
- the hospital's location

### **Booking your first appointment**

You or your GP can book your first outpatient appointment through the national NHS e-Referral Service service. Either:

- your GP can book it while you're at the surgery
- you can book it online using the appointment request letter your GP gives you
- you can phone the NHS e-Referral Service appointments line on 0345 6088 888 (open 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday, 8am to 4pm on weekends and bank holidays)