

# Finding your way around the NHS

**Knowing how your local NHS facilities work can help you get the most from your healthcare professionals and so get the best possible management of your condition.**

In particular, knowing the right part of the NHS to contact when you have a problem could also save you valuable time and get the help you need much faster. Here's an overview of the different services on offer:

- The GP surgery you are registered with is likely to be your first port of call for most NHS services. Your GP may take responsibility for your treatment – or may refer you to a specialist.
- Specialists are normally accessed via a referral from your GP. In many cases, you will see your specialist in your local hospital
- NHS Direct is a 24-hour helpline which gives you access to confidential healthcare advice and information, provided by a nurse. You can contact NHS Direct on 0845 4647. If you prefer, you can visit NHS Direct online at [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)
- Walk-in centres offer instant access to treatments that can be provided by a nurse, for conditions such as strains, burns, coughs and colds. Visit the NHS walk-in centre section of the NHS website to find one near to you.
- The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) provides confidential advice and support, to help you sort out any concerns or complaints you may have about the care you get from the NHS.
- Minor injuries units are staffed by specialist nurses, with waiting times normally shorter than Accident and Emergency. To find your nearest minor injuries unit – and to check that it is the suitable place to treat your problem – call NHS Direct on 0845 4647.
- Accident and Emergency is normally open 24 hours a day for serious problems that cannot wait until your doctor is available. To find your nearest Accident and Emergency department, including its opening hours, call NHS Direct on 0845 4647. It's useful to keep this information in an easily accessible place.
- Community services can be provided in clinics, health centres or even your home – and can include services like chiropody or physiotherapy.
- Ambulance services are for serious medical emergencies only.

For further information about how the NHS works and the services you have access to, you can visit the NHS website, [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)