



NHS dentistry in England: information for patients

This leaflet tells you about NHS dental services in England, what to expect when you go to the dentist, and where you can get more information. It also tells you about charges for NHS dental services.

Updated April 2008



Introduction

The dental health of children is much better today than it was 30 years ago. The dental health of adults is also much better. This is mostly as a result of fluoride in toothpaste.

Making just a few simple changes to what you eat and drink and how you brush your teeth can make a big difference to the health of your mouth, gums and teeth, for example:

- brushing regularly with a fluoride toothpaste
- cutting down on how often you have sugary food and drinks
- not smoking or using other tobacco products
- drinking alcohol within limits advised by doctors
- wearing gum shields when playing sport.

Visiting your dentist regularly is also very important.

For further information about looking after your teeth and dental health, see the Live well dental health section of the NHS choices website www.nhs.uk

The website also has a Health A–Z section where you can look up information on a range of dental health treatments and conditions.

NHS dental services in England

Your local primary care trust (PCT) is in charge of arranging NHS dental services in your area. These services include urgent treatment, out-of-hours care and emergencies. If you are having problems finding an NHS dentist, your PCT is there to help.

You do not need to register with a dentist to get regular treatment. Simply contact a practice offering NHS dentistry and ask if you can have an appointment.

This is also the case if you are related to someone serving in the armed forces and are currently based in England.

Asylum seekers and refugees who have been allowed to remain in the UK, or who are waiting for the results of an application to remain or for an appeal, are also entitled to NHS dental treatment.

You will be able to have any treatment that your dentist feels you need in order to keep your teeth, gums and mouth healthy on the NHS. These treatments include dentures, crowns and bridges as well as any preventive treatment needed. Your dentist should also give you advice on how to keep your teeth, gums and mouth healthy.

Your dentist will ask you back for regular check ups – but not necessarily as frequently as every six months. If your dental health is good, you may only be asked to come for a check up every two years.

How to find an NHS dentist

Go to the search section at the top of the home page of the NHS choices website www.nhs.uk, select the Dentists box and put in your postcode. This will bring up a list of dentists in your area. From here you can click through for more information about which practices are taking on new NHS patients and how to contact your PCT if you are having difficulty finding one. You will also find a dental enquiries telephone number and details of how to obtain out-of-hours treatment. You will also be able to find the telephone number of your PCT in your local phone book. Alternatively you can call NHS Direct on 0845 4647.*

If you do not have your own computer, your local library can usually provide free internet access to NHS choices on request.

Your local **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)** may also be able to help. See your local phone book for details or visit www.pals.nhs.uk

Finding urgent, out-of-hours and emergency treatment

Even if you do not have a regular dentist, you can always get urgent NHS dental care, or be treated out of normal surgery hours, if clinically necessary. Contact your PCT (office hours only), or go to www.nhs.uk (and follow the search details given on page 3 under How to find an NHS Dentist) or call NHS Direct on 0845 4647* (available 24 hours a day) for more details.

NHS dental charges

NHS dental charges are now simpler and easier to understand. Depending on what you need to have done, you will only ever be asked to pay one set price for each course of either Band 1, Band 2 or Band 3 treatment – see the list of costs below.

Some people will not have to pay anything at all – see pages 6 and 7 to find out if this applies to you.

Your dentist should always tell you how much you need to pay before starting your treatment.

*Calls cost a maximum of 4p per minute from a BT landline. The cost of calls from mobiles and other networks may vary. Your service provider may charge a minimum price per call. For patients' safety, all calls to NHS Direct are recorded.

Patient charges from 1 April 2008

From 1 April 2008, dental charges for NHS patients are as follows:

Band 1 course of treatment

£16.20

This covers an examination, diagnosis (e.g. x-rays), advice on how to prevent future problems, and a scale and polish if needed.

Band 2 course of treatment

£44.60

This covers everything listed in Band 1 above, plus any further treatment such as fillings, root canal work or if your dentist needs to take out one or more of your teeth.

Band 3 course of treatment

£198.00

This covers everything listed in Bands 1 and 2 above, plus crowns, dentures or bridges.

Urgent Treatment

If you require urgent care, but your urgent treatment needs more than one appointment to complete, you will only need to pay one charge of £16.20.

These are the only dental charges your dentist should ask you to pay when you are having NHS treatment.

For details of out-of-hours and emergency care, see page 4 of this leaflet.

Your treatment costs explained

The charge you pay depends on the treatment you need to keep your teeth and gums healthy (see the introduction at the front of this leaflet for some useful hints and tips).

All charges apply to an overall course of treatment, and not the individual items within the course of treatment.

You will only have to pay one charge for each course of treatment – even if you need to visit your dentist more than once to finish it.

If you need more treatment within the same or lower charge band (for example an additional filling) within two months of completing a course of treatment, you do not have to pay anything extra.

You do not have to pay to have your dentures repaired, for having stitches out, or if your dentist has to stop blood loss. Neither do you have to pay if your dentist only needs to write out a prescription. (But if you pay for your prescriptions, you will pay the usual charge when you collect your medicine from your pharmacist.)

You may sometimes be asked to pay all, or some of, your treatment costs before you start a course of treatment. Check this with your practice and always ask for a receipt when you make a payment.

Free NHS dental treatment

You do not have to pay for NHS dental treatment if – when the treatment starts – you are:

- aged under 18
- aged 18 and in full-time education
- pregnant or a mother who has had a baby in the previous 12 months
- staying in an NHS hospital and your treatment is carried out by the hospital dentist
- an NHS Hospital Dental Service outpatient (however, you may have to pay for your dentures or bridges).

You also do not have to pay if – when the treatment starts or when you are asked to pay – you:

- are getting, or your partner is getting, Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance or Pension Credit guarantee credit
- have, or your name is on, a valid NHS tax credit exemption certificate
- have the right to full help under the NHS Low Income Scheme (i.e. you are named on a valid HC2 certificate).

How to claim free NHS dental treatment

You will be asked to show your dentist written proof that you can claim free NHS treatment. You will also be asked to sign a form (HC1) to confirm that you do not have to pay.

If you have the right to partial help under the NHS Low Income Scheme, and your name is on a valid HC3 certificate, you may not have to pay for all your treatment.

You will need form HC1 to claim for full (HC2) or partial (HC3) help with NHS dental costs. These forms are available from your Jobcentre Plus office or by calling 0845 850 1166 or 08701 555 455.

To find out more about free NHS dental treatment and how to go about getting it, see *Help with health costs* (HC11), which is available from post offices, Jobcentre Plus offices and dental surgeries. It can also be downloaded from www.dh.gov.uk

Help with health costs also has details about the new Healthcare Travel Costs Scheme (HTCS). This started on 1 April 2008 and means that, if you receive certain benefits or are on a low income and you are referred to a hospital for specialist dental treatment, you may be able to get help with the cost of travelling to and from your appointments.

Checks are made on free treatment claims. If you say you have the right to free treatment when you do not, you could go to court and/or have to pay a fine.

If you pay for your treatment but later find out that it should have been free, you can claim a refund. You need to do this within three months of the date that you paid. To do this, you need form HC5, which is available from post offices, Jobcentre Plus offices and dental surgeries. It can also be downloaded from www.dh.gov.uk

What to expect from your dentist

Your dentist should always:

- undertake a full examination of your mouth, teeth and gums
- explain your treatment options and let you know what treatment can be done on the NHS and what other work (e.g. cosmetic treatment) can be done privately if you wish
- make sure you know how much your NHS and/or private treatment will cost
- give you a treatment plan for any proposed Band 2 or 3 treatment (see page 5 for details)
- offer all the care and treatment needed to maintain your dental health – and that you wish to receive as an NHS patient – as part of a single course of treatment
- make a leaflet available to you with information about the practice and its services
- display a poster about NHS charges in the waiting room.

If your dentist does not offer all of the above services and information, you have the right to ask for them. You also have the right to make a complaint if you are not happy with the way you are dealt with or treated – see page 10, 'Making a complaint'.

What your dentist expects from you

Give as much notice as possible if you have to cancel or change your appointment. If you miss appointments you do not have to pay, but your dentist can decide not to offer you treatment in future.

Try to follow your dentist's advice on how to avoid tooth decay and gum disease.

Always ask your dentist if there is something you do not understand.

Pay your treatment bills promptly.

Your treatment plan

Your dentist should give you a treatment plan to sign before carrying out any Band 2 or 3 treatments. This confirms the NHS treatment your dentist is going to do, and the amount you will need to pay for it on the NHS. If you have talked to your dentist about having private treatment, the details and costs of this will be listed separately on the same form. Please ask your dentist to explain any risks, as well as costs, of treatment. All clinically necessary treatment, including root canal work, is available on the NHS and should be provided as part of your NHS treatment unless you agree to specific private treatment with your dentist.

If you are not given a treatment plan, please ask your dentist for one. If you are not offered necessary treatment as part of your NHS treatment plan (for example you are only offered it if you pay for it privately) you should contact your local PCT for assistance and advice.

To see what a treatment plan form looks like, go to www.dh.gov.uk/dental

Orthodontic (teeth straightening) treatment

In April 2006 the NHS introduced new rules which mean that orthodontic treatment is only given to people who need it for clinical reasons. More details about why and how this is done are available on the British Orthodontic Society website www.bos.org.uk

If you or your child are told that you do not meet NHS requirements for orthodontic treatment, you can ask to be referred for private treatment, in which case you will need to pay private charges. Whether your orthodontic treatment is NHS or private, your dentist will always need to refer you to an orthodontist.

Being referred to another dentist

If you are referred to another dentist as part of an existing course of treatment, you will still only pay one charge (to the dentist who refers you). However, if you are referred to another dentist for a new course of treatment, you will need to pay two sets of charges. (This does not apply if you have the right to free NHS treatment – see pages 6 and 7 for full details.) Please check with your dentist. Reasons for this sort of referral might include having treatment under sedation, going to see an orthodontist, or if your dentist comes to see you on a home visit.

Ask your PCT if you would like more information on NHS sedation, orthodontic and home visit services in your area.

Hospital waiting times

By December 2008, the longest you will wait for non-emergency specialist NHS dental care will be 18 weeks from referral to treatment, usually much less. Any appointments, tests, scans or other procedures that you may need before being treated will all happen within this time limit. For more information about waiting times, please see: www.18weeks.nhs.uk/endwaiting/

Private treatment

Some treatments, e.g. tooth whitening and other cosmetic work, are not usually available on the NHS. After talking to your dentist, you may choose to have these privately. Please ask your dentist to explain any risks, as well as costs, of all treatment.

Note: your dentist is not allowed to offer children treatment on the NHS on the condition that a parent or guardian is a private patient.

Making a complaint

NHS treatment

You should first speak to the practice. If you are not happy with their response, you should then contact your PCT.

Full details on how to make a complaint about NHS dentistry can be found at:

www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Complaints-about-NHS-services/Pages/How-does-it-work.aspx?url=Pages/What-is-it.aspx

Private treatment

To make a complaint about private dental services, contact the Dental Complaints Service on 08456 120540, email info@dentalcomplaints.org.uk, or visit:

www.dentalcomplaints.org.uk

Other useful information

The NHS choices website www.nhs.uk contains lots of information about where to find a local dentist and how to look after your dental health. You will also find sections on a range of related subjects such as who does what in the dental team and conquering your fear of the dentist.

www.dh.gov.uk/dental

See the section called *Information for patients and the public* for a sample treatment plan, how often to visit your dentist and other advice.

British Dental Health Foundation

Tel 0845 063 1188 or visit www.dentalhealth.org

Citizens Advice

See your local phone book for the nearest branch or visit www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Which?

(formerly the Consumers' Association) Tel: 0845 307 4000 or visit www.which.co.uk

Getting involved

The introduction of Local Involvement Networks (LINKs), from 1 April 2008, means there are now even more ways in which you can have your say and make a real difference to your local NHS health services, including dentistry. For more information, get in touch with your PCT or see

www.dh.gov.uk/en/Managingyourorganisation/PatientAndPublicinvolvement/DH_076366



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