

Getting help from a general practitioner (GP)



What is a general practitioner?

General practitioners (GPs) are doctors who are trained to help you with any type of physical or mental health issue. They keep your health issues private and their services are either free or at a low cost. This means that seeing a GP is a great place to start when you are concerned about any health issues including contraception, sexual health, drug or alcohol use, relationship problems, or feeling down or upset.

GPs are widely available around Australia.

Finding a GP



Your family GP is often a good place to start if you need some help and feel comfortable talking to them.

Even if they know your family they are still required to keep information about you private. (There is more information about confidentiality over the page).

Another way of finding a GP is to ask your friends, family or someone at school or work who they would recommend. There might also be a medical centre in your area where you can simply drop in and ask about their services. Schools, TAFEs and universities often know about local GPs and sometimes have their own medical services. A quick search online will also help you find a GP nearby.

Most **headspace** centres have a GP and can also link you in with other health workers at the **headspace** centre if you need it.

Costs and Medicare

When you make your appointment ask the receptionist about the costs of your visit. Many GPs 'bulk bill' the full cost of the consultation to Medicare, so you won't have to pay anything. This is usually the case with a **headspace** GP.

You will need to show a Medicare card or give your Medicare number to be bulk billed. With some GPs you may need to pay a small fee but with a Medicare card you will be able to get most of the money back later.

You can use a parent's or family's card but if you are Australian and over 15 years of age you are entitled to have your own Medicare card. Having your own card means that your parents are unable to review your visits to the doctor. You can apply for your own card by filling out a form available at a Medicare office, or through the Medicare website (www.medicareaustralia.gov.au). Your GP and some pharmacists might have forms as well.

Making an appointment

You'll usually need to make an appointment to see a GP, either by phoning or dropping into their medical practice.

The receptionist doesn't need to know the reason why you want to see the GP but on your first visit you will have to provide your personal contact details. If you don't feel comfortable going on your own consider taking someone else to the appointment; a friend, parent or relative.



Some GPs may not have appointments for new patients for a week or two, or sometimes even longer. Let them know if it's an urgent problem. **If you need immediate medical attention call 000** or go to a hospital Emergency Department.

Appointments are usually for 10-15 minutes. For your first appointment, or if you have a number of issues you want to talk about, ask for a longer appointment so you have plenty of time to cover everything.

First appointments with GPs at **headspace** centres are usually



longer so that they can get to know you. If your concerns are about a physical health, sexual health or contraception issues you will probably get an appointment quite soon. If you are asking for help with mental health issues, including feeling worried, upset or down, you may be seen by another health worker before seeing a GP.



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What to expect when you visit a GP

At your first visit the GP will usually ask a range of questions about your general health and lifestyle, your family background, how you are thinking and feeling, and how you are getting on at school/work/study and with your family and friends.



GPs need to know about you as a 'whole person' so that they can understand the problem and give you the right advice. They are not prying into your life for no reason, and they are not making judgments about you.

The GP might want to give you a physical check-up, for example by taking your blood pressure, heart rate and temperature, or examining other parts of your body relevant to your problem. A GP cannot perform any type of physical examination without your permission.

The GP will then discuss the problem and what to do next. Ask questions so you understand what is going on and what you can do to feel better.

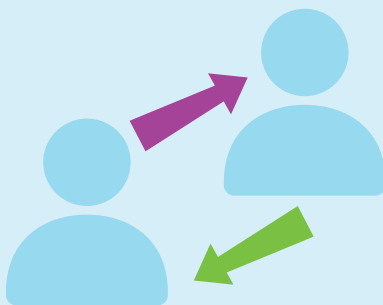
Sometimes the GP will ask you to come back for a return visit to check on your progress, discuss the results of any tests, or just to have some more time to explore the problem. To make sure everything is going okay for you or to monitor other health problems, the GP may also want to see you regularly.

The GP may talk with you about seeing someone like a psychologist or counsellor to support you with your mental health. They will explain how this might help, what services are available and how to get started. They can also fill out a mental health care plan to help you access these services for free.



Changing GPs

If you are not feeling comfortable and safe with your GP you can change to another GP and ask that your medical records get transferred.



Confidentiality

All GPs have to keep information about their patients private. This means they cannot discuss your visit with anyone else but there are some exceptions.

If a GP thinks you are likely to harm yourself or someone else they have a 'duty of care' to make sure you stay safe so they may need to tell other people. There are also some circumstances by law that require GPs to share information.



If you want to know more about your rights to privacy and confidentiality ask your GP to talk it through with you at the beginning of your first appointment.