



Gastroenterology – Keeping healthy





Introduction

The Gastroenterology service at Bedfordshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust is based across both of our two sites, Bedford Hospital and the Luton and Dunstable University Hospital, with a team of 17 consultants.

Support while you wait

The Gastroenterology Service has been significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Our staff have worked tirelessly through the pandemic to meet unprecedented levels of demand, and unfortunately this has impacted our ability to deliver planned care. Though we must continue to prioritise the most critically unwell patients, we are doing everything we can to address the backlog of appointments, with the provision of extra clinics and endoscopy sessions when possible.

We know that you have experienced a long wait for your hospital appointment or treatment and understand how distressing this must be. We would like to apologise for this and assure you that we are working hard to reach you as quickly as we can. We are exploring all possible options for increasing activity safely to reduce waiting times.

To support you while you wait and to let you know that we are still here for you, we have created this patient information platform. It has been designed to help you manage your condition and your overall health.

During this waiting period, you may have further questions about your proposed treatment, or your health may have changed. In this instance, we would like you to call and speak to a member of the team by contacting your surgeon's secretary. Their contact details will be on the most recent letter from your consultant.

During your appointment

You will be asked some questions at your appointment - here are some examples to think about.

If your appointment is to discuss the possibility of treatment, the healthcare professional you are seeing will talk to you about:

- How your condition is affecting your life and what matters to you.
- What any tests, examinations or investigations about your condition have found.
- The possible benefits of treatment for you.
- What risks there might be for you from having the treatment or procedure.
- How your procedure/treatment would be carried out and whether you might need to stay overnight.
- Whether there is a choice of providers for your treatment – sometimes it is possible to have your appointment more quickly by travelling out of your local area or if a private provider has been asked to deliver your care.



- How long your recovery may take and what you might need to do as part of your recovery. For example, attending appointments to have your dressings changed.
- Whether there are any activities that you won't be able to take part in for a while afterwards. For example, certain kinds of work, household tasks like cleaning or doing the laundry, or driving.
- If there are any alternative options to surgery which may suit you better.
- What would be likely to happen if you don't have any treatment.
- Your healthcare professional will also talk to you about how long you might have to wait for your treatment procedure and the things you can do to stay as well as possible while you are waiting.
- They will also take the time to ensure you understand all the information they have given you.

Please remember that it is okay to ask questions. Your healthcare provider wants you to have all the information that you need to help you decide what the best plan and right treatment is for you. It is your right to be involved as much or as little as you would like in making decisions about your health and care plans. There is no pressure to decide on your treatment plan at your appointment, if you need more time to think about it and discuss with your family and friends, it is okay to ask for this.

Preparing for your treatment

It is a good idea to prepare your body and mind prior to any treatment. In the time before your treatment, you can take simple steps to help improve your physical and mental health. This can help to reduce your risk of complications from any treatment or procedure and improve your wellbeing. This can be referred to as 'prehabilitation'. Research shows that people who keep mentally or physically active feel happier and healthier.

It is a good idea to make the most of the time before you see your specialist by stopping smoking, maintaining a healthy weight, getting fitter and drinking less alcohol.

Take your medication

Please continue to take any medication as advised and prescribed by your GP or other healthcare professionals until you are informed to make any changes that may be required for treatment.

It is important to bring a list of the medications you are taking to all appointments. If you have any queries please contact your GP.

Keep moving

Your heart and lungs have to work harder after an operation to help the body to heal. If you are already active, your heart and lungs will be used to this. While you are waiting for your operation, try to increase your activity levels. Brisk walking, swimming, cycling, gardening, or playing with your children are all helpful activities.



Try to do any activity which makes you feel out of breath at least three times per week, but always check with your doctor first what type of exercise is most appropriate for you. Activities that improve your strength and balance will also be useful for your recovery.

Below is a list of resources which could be helpful for your prehabilitation and recovery:

NHS - Better Health: <https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/>

NHS - Exercise resources: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise>

Health matters: physical activity - prevention and management of long-term conditions: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-matters-physical-activity/health-matters-physical-activity-prevention-and-management-of-long-term-conditions>

Dr. Zoe Williams - NHS GP and PHE Physical Activity Clinical Champion Interview – YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=59ntVvTXJFc>

Improve your health

One You (NHS Hub)

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou>

One You provides tips, tools, support and encouragement every step of the way, to help improve your health right away. You are not alone – One You can help you make small changes yourself, or with friends and family.

Smoking

Stopping smoking is hard, but the good news is that quitting or cutting down shortly before treatment can improve wound healing and lung function and reduce the length of any stay in hospital.

Weight

If you are overweight, losing weight can help to reduce the stress on your heart and lungs. In addition, it can help to:

- lower your blood pressure
- Improve your blood sugar levels
- Reduce pain joint pain
- Allow you to exercise more easily.

Alcohol

Alcohol can have many effects on the body, and it can reduce the liver's ability to produce the building blocks necessary for healing. Make sure you are drinking within the recommended limits, or lower, to improve your body's ability to heal.

Managing medical conditions



It is important to make sure any known conditions are controlled as well as possible ahead of your treatment. You can also book in for a general health check at your GP surgery if you are between 40 and 74 years old.

Diabetes

Think about your diet and weight. Talk to your diabetes nurse or team early to see if they need to make any changes to your treatment.

Blood pressure

Blood pressure should be controlled to safe levels to reduce your risk of a stroke, and operations may be delayed if it is too high. Have your blood pressure checked at your surgery well ahead of your operation – some GP surgeries have automated machines so you can pop in any time. If it is high, your GP can check your medications and make any changes needed ahead of the operation.

Anaemia (low blood count)

If you have been bleeding or have a chronic medical condition, a blood test can check whether you are anaemic. If you are, you should talk to your GP.

Heart, lung, and other medical problems

If you have any other long-term medical problems, consider asking your GP or nurse for a review of your medications, especially if you think your health is not as good as it could be.

Dental health

If you have loose teeth or crowns, a visit to the dentist may reduce the risk of damage to your teeth during an operation.

COVID-19 vaccination

If you are eligible for a COVID-19 vaccination, it is recommended that you have this prior to attending hospital appointments. To find out if you are eligible, [visit the NHS COVID-19 vaccination pages](#). If you are eligible and would [like to book your vaccination appointment, visit the national booking service](#).

Healthy living

It's normal to feel anxious about treatment - improving your health beforehand can help you recover. People who are able to improve their health and activity levels recover more quickly after treatment.

We all have parts of our lives that we would like to change, from stopping smoking to achieving and maintaining a healthier weight. The good news is that, as well as improving your health in the long term, making those changes ahead of your treatment can reduce your risk of a range of complications.

Managing pain

You may experience pain or discomfort while you are waiting for an appointment or treatment. Pain can have a huge impact on our lives; from how we move, to our mood and



sleep quality. Frustratingly, pain can affect what matters most to us in life, be it our relationships with family and friends, or our ability to work and take part in hobbies. Everyone's pain experience is unique, and everyone has different goals they would like to work towards. Having better knowledge around your condition can help you increase your confidence when making decisions around what to change and how to take control back of your life.

Money worries

Treatment could affect how many hours you are able to work, and how much you are earning. If you are struggling to pay bills, need help with a benefits issue, or are concerned about growing debt, there is free, confidential support and advice available.

- Benefit Calculator - Turn2Us (<https://benefits-calculator.turn2us.org.uk>)
- Free Debt Advice - Step change (https://www.stepchange.org/?channel=ppc&gclid=Cj0KCQiA5OuNBhCRARIsACgaiqWgryplLKfryDhpGNnl_SVXX2po9jQKylEb_rqGoa8ivlqMqiAdHBQaAomdEALw_wcB)
- NHS - Low income Scheme (<https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/nhs-low-income-scheme>)
- Access to Work - Employment support programme that aims to help more disabled people start or stay in work (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/access-to-work-factsheet/access-to-work-factsheet-for-customers>)

Your local Citizens Advice can help you find a way forward, whatever the problem. They offer confidential information and advice to assist people with legal, debt, consumer, housing, and other problems. Contact your local Citizens Advice (<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/>) office for more information and access to online support.

Carers can need help too - support is available

We know that there are many people who are caring for family and friends while they are waiting for a hospital appointment or treatment. This might include help with washing, dressing, shopping, and taking medicines and also emotional support, ensuring that the person feels cared for and not alone. Carers UK (<https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/get-support>) are a national charity that offers support for carers with employment, practical support, technology and equipment among other things.

Good Mental Health

People sometimes feel worried or anxious before a hospital appointment or treatment. This is perfectly normal. Some people might also find that an existing mental health condition can worsen. You can find helpful links for mental health support on the NHS website: www.nhs.uk/mental-health/

Mental health charity, Mind, also has webpages about COVID-19 and your wellbeing: www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing

Talking therapies, or psychological therapies, are effective and confidential treatments delivered by fully trained and accredited NHS practitioners. They can help with common



mental health problems like stress, anxiety and depression.

Access to support where you live

Our patients come to us from many different counties. Here you will find further support available to you in the location you live.

Bedfordshire

<https://www.bedford.gov.uk/social-care-health-and-community/public-health/>

- Stop smoking
- Drugs and alcohol
- Emotional wellbeing
- Healthy weight – Links to more life –
 - <https://www.more-life.co.uk/what-we-do/ourservices/in-your-area/bedford>
- NHS health checks
- Health protection

Luton

<https://www.totalwellbeingluton.org/>

- Emotional Health
- Stop Smoking
- Weight Management
- Exercise on Referral
- Long term Conditions
- Social Prescriptions

Milton Keynes

<https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/health-and-wellbeing-hub>

- Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Stop Smoking
- Drugs & Alcohol
- Healthy weight – Links to more life –

<https://www.more-life.co.uk/what-we-do/ourservices/in-your-area/bedford>

Northamptonshire

<https://www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/councilservices/health/Pages/default.aspx>

- Active Living
- Eating Well
- Mental wellbeing
- Stop Smoking
- Weight management
- Drugs & Alcohol
- Social wellbeing



Cambridgeshire

www.bewellcambridgeshire.co.uk

- Mental health and wellbeing
- Smoking
- Active living
- Healthy eating
- Alcohol

Hertfordshire

www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/health-in-herts/health-in-herts.aspx

- Wellbeing and mental health
- Healthy weight
- Keep active
- Stop smoking
- Drugs and alcohol
- Long term conditions

Cancelling your appointment

We understand that some patients may choose to have their appointment and treatment elsewhere. We advocate patient choice on where you access treatment though please do let us know if you no longer require an appointment with us. It is important that you notify us at the soonest possible opportunity so we can remove you from the waiting list. This can be done via telephone or online.

Contact Us

If you have been referred to the hospital by your GP you may need to be seen in clinic before you are booked for any investigative procedures. Once you have been referred for a procedure you will be contacted by telephone by relevant department.

If you do have any questions about your Endoscopy booking or visits please telephone:

- Bedford Hospital Endoscopy Unit: 01234 792269
- Luton and Dunstable Endoscopy Unit: 01582 497273 or 01582 718454