

Frequently asked questions for patients regarding e-Consult

What is eConsult?

eConsult is a platform that allows you to seek self-help information from the NHS, through your GP practice or surgery website. Services include self-help information, advice or help from local services which may be appropriate for your condition, such as self-referral services or help from your local pharmacy. eConsult also allows you to seek advice online from your own GP for your condition or if you need general or administrative advice.

How does eConsult work?

eConsult asks you questions about your symptoms or existing condition, and only takes a few minutes to complete. After filling in some details about you, to verify who you are, your eConsult is sent to your GP practice, so that they can help you. In having this information upfront, your practice can then decide on the best course of action for helping you manage your symptoms and condition, and this may mean you don't have to come into the surgery unnecessarily.

If your symptoms sound very serious, the system has been built with the clinical knowledge to know that you may need help more quickly than your practice can provide - in these cases, it will stop you from completing your eConsult and suggest that you seek urgent medical advice.

Why use eConsult?

One of the key benefits of eConsult is that it is available at any time and from any device - meaning you can ask for advice from your GP without having to queue on the phone at 8:00am or wait weeks for an appointment you may not need. You can complete eConsult from the comfort of your own home, on a break at work, or on the train home. eConsults can be clinical or administrative in nature, and in most cases, your GP may not need to see you face-to-face for an appointment.

If you decide you want to manage your condition without contacting your practice, eConsult can guide you towards trusted medical advice as well as relevant local services, such as pharmacy support, which may be more appropriate than visiting your GP practice.

The eConsult service can be trusted - it was built for NHS GPs by NHS GPs, and is the leading online consultation provider across the UK.

Who can use eConsult?

eConsult is available for anyone from the age of 6 months and up. Parents or guardians can complete eConsults for children aged 6 months up to 18 years of age, although 16 to 18-year olds can also complete eConsults for themselves. There is no upper age limit for eConsults.

What can I use eConsult for?

eConsult is one of a range of services your GP practice offers to make accessing the right help from general practice easy. eConsults can be either administrative or medical (clinical) in need.

eConsult can help you to manage your condition or symptoms by providing you with the best self-help information available, access to local services, or a convenient way to get help and advice from your GP practice. Instead of having to wait weeks for an appointment or queue on the phone for hours, eConsult allows you to tell your practice what you need help or treatment for, so that they can advise you on the best next steps, all at your convenience.

eConsult should not be used for emergencies. Should you report symptoms that our clinical governance team have deemed to require more urgent help than your GP practice may be able to provide, your eConsult will be stopped. You will be advised that your eConsult will not be sent to your practice, and that you should seek advice from the relevant urgent care service (e.g. A&E, Urgent Care Centre or NHS 111 helpline).

As a parent or guardian of a child between the ages of 6 months to 18 years, you will be able to submit eConsults about a limited list of symptoms or conditions. For all other matters relating to children please call our reception team.

eConsults can also be used to follow-up on previous discussions or appointments you have had with your doctor. This means you can avoid having to make an appointment with the doctor, but you can still keep them informed of the outcome. In this way, you can tell your doctor the outcome in your own time, knowing that they will respond in the most appropriate way, even if this is just to thank you for keeping them updated.

How do I access eConsult?

eConsult is available on your practice website from any device and at any time of day. You will see a banner on your practice's website that invites you to contact your doctors online. Depending on the type of advice or help you then select, you will be presented with different options that may include an online form used to seek help or advice from your GP.

If you don't have access to the internet or a device that would allow you to use eConsult, a member of the reception team will help you to complete an eConsult over the telephone.

Can I submit an eConsult for someone else/my child?

As a parent or guardian of a child between the ages of 6 months to 18 years, you will be able to submit eConsults about symptoms or conditions. Patients using the eConsult service should submit forms based on their own symptoms or conditions.

In some cases, it may be likely that people need help submitting an eConsult, perhaps because they cannot access or are not comfortable using services online. In these situations, please speak to a member of the reception team for assistance.

What happens once I submit my eConsult?

Once you have submitted your eConsult online, you will receive a copy of the eConsult report via email. This email will also contain the unique reference number for your eConsult, should you need to speak to the practice about any of the information it contains.

The practice will aim to respond to your eConsult by the end of the next working day, but often sooner.

The practice may respond in a variety of ways, based on the advised next steps or the urgency of the information you have provided:

- You may be offered an appointment, either on the day or for a later date. This may not be with your GP, but may be with an advanced nurse practitioner or other health professional at the practice, depending on your query.
- You may receive a phone call for you to speak to a health professional at the practice, this is because you may not need a face-to-face appointment to resolve your query. This will save you from having to come into the practice.
- You may be directed to another health professional outside of the practice, as they may be best placed to offer you the advice or support you need. These may include local pharmacy support, a minor injuries unit or other services such as physiotherapy.
- You may be directed towards the appropriate self-help advice by a member of the practice.

We may call you back or leave a voicemail if we are unable to reach you. You may receive a text message or email with further information; however, you may not be able to respond to the message you have received. This is to ensure your safety, as we cannot discuss personal matters unless we are certain we are speaking to you, or someone who you have authorised to speak to us on your behalf.

How will I benefit from eConsult?

- eConsult allows you to seek advice from your GP or help yourself to manage your condition or symptoms at all hours of the day, from wherever you are. This may be the same GP at the same practice that you have been to for years, meaning they are familiar with your medical history and can continue to treat you.
- The service will make interacting with your GP more convenient - you may not have to come into the practice to get help, meaning you don't have to take unnecessary days off from work or can stay at home if you feel poorly.
- You won't have to queue on the phone as soon as the practice opens in order to get an appointment - you simply tell the practice what you need help or advice for, and they will let you know if you need a face to face appointment, and how soon this needs to be.
- If your problem might be treated without a face-to-face appointment, saving you a trip to your practice. Instead your GP may call you to discuss the best next steps, send you for tests before a face-to-face appointment, or send your prescription to the local pharmacy to be collected.

How will the practice benefit from eConsult?

- Patients with the most urgent issues will be identified quickly and offered appointments earlier than the current system allows. This is because we will already have an idea of what you might need help for. This will improve safety by making sure those who need help quickly get it.
- We will try to make sure your eConsult is dealt with by the GP you have requested - this means you will continue to be cared for by the doctor that knows you best. This will be possible because they will have time to better manage the needs of all their patients.
- Your GP may not be the most appropriate person to see - eConsult helps us to know what you might need help for, so that you can see the right member of staff for the help you need the first time around. This means that we can better manage available resources in a time of difficulties within the NHS.
- As we can see what patients using eConsult might need help for, requests can be seen and a decision made on how urgently patients need to be seen, if they need a face-to-face appointment at all. We can then offer appointments in the practice to those who need them most urgently, or are available to make visits to elderly patients at home or in care homes.

Why are you making these changes?

As we're sure you have read in the media, the NHS faces many concerns, and general practice is a key part of ensuring patients get the best care. We need to do all we can to modernise and prepare for future challenges.

People are living longer and with more long-term health problems that require more medical help and support. Patients are going to see their GP twice as many times each year as they were 10 years ago. There is increasing difficulty for practices to recruit and retain doctors or other staff to work in their surgeries and in the last few years, across the UK, many practices have had to close down as a result of this.

Continually developing and modernising the way we work as a practice will help us provide a high-quality service to patients while ensuring that we remain a strong and sustainable medical practice for the future so that this care can be provided to generations of families to come.

We believe that eConsult allows us to offer you more convenient access to information and advice. It helps us to deliver great care to our patients, allowing us to prioritise patients who need more urgent care or need to be seen face to face, whilst still enabling us to provide advice to patients who have a less urgent need for advice.