

Referrals and your right to choose

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When a healthcare professional – like your GP refers you for routine treatment, you can usually choose which hospital or service you go to, and sometimes even the team or consultant who treats you if they offer the care you need.

Your GP will try to give you at least five suitable options. You can decide based on things like:

- Travel distance
- Waiting times
- Support from friends or family nearby
- Patient reviews and official ratings



You can choose where to go during your appointment but if you'd rather take more time to think about your options, you can do that too.

Where can I find information and support to help me choose?

If you'd like to research your options, there are several places where you can get information about hospitals and services:

- **My Planned Care:** <https://www.myplannedcare.nhs.uk/> is updated each week with information such as waiting times.
- You can use the **NHS website:** <https://www.nhs.uk/> to compare information about hospitals, services and consultants.
- You can find information about NHS and independent care providers on the **Care Quality Commission website:** <https://www.cqc.org.uk/> including how patients and healthcare regulators rate them.

Once you've decided, Inform your GP and get a referral:

- Discuss your choice- once you have made your selection, tell your GP which provider you have chosen and inform them of your decision.
- Follow the specific process- ask your GP how to proceed with the referral, as the process can vary by provider.



Good to know:

If I choose a provider further away from home, will I have to travel to this hospital for follow-up appointments? You'll need to travel to the hospital you pick for your first outpatient appointment and any follow-up appointments, so keep this in mind when you choose a provider.

If I choose a provider outside my area, am I entitled to travel or accommodation expenses? The NHS has a scheme called the Healthcare Travel Costs Scheme (HTCS): that lets you claim a refund for reasonable travel costs if you're eligible. If you're eligible for the HTCS, and the healthcare professional who refers you says it's medically necessary for someone to travel with you, that person can also claim travel costs. Find out more here: <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/help-with-health-costs/healthcare-travel-costs-scheme-htcs/> or call their helpline: 0300 330 1343.

What if I don't want to choose an alternative provider? Patient choice is a right, but it's not a requirement. Your healthcare professional can refer you to your local service if you'd like them to.

Are there any times when I won't get a choice? You have a right to choose your care provider at the point of most routine referrals. However, patient choice rights don't apply where speed of access to diagnosis and treatment is essential, such as an urgent suspected cancer referral.

There are also exceptions if you are:

- In need of urgent or emergency treatment
- Accessing maternity services
- Serving in the armed forces
- Detained under the Mental Health Act
- Detained or temporarily released from prison, an immigration removal centre or a secure children's home
- Referred to high-security psychiatric services or drug and alcohol misuse services provided by local authorities



Healthwatch Sheffield is your local health and social care champion. We make sure NHS leaders and other decision makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care.

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