

## Dental care: NHS and private treatment

### About this factsheet

This factsheet explains what you can expect if you receive NHS dental treatment, the charging system for NHS treatment and what you can do if you are dissatisfied with the care you receive. It also briefly looks at private dental treatment.

Information in this factsheet is correct for the period April 2010 – March 2011.

This factsheet describes the situation in England. Readers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should contact their respective national Age UK offices for information specific to where they live – see section 14 for details.

For details of how to order other Age UK factsheets and information materials mentioned inside go to section 14.

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**Note:** Many local Age Concerns are changing their name to Age UK.

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## 1 Recent developments

- Charges for NHS treatment are reviewed annually. This factsheet lists charges that apply from 1 April 2010. There has been no change to the charges that applied from April 2009 – March 2010.

## 2 Finding a dentist who offers NHS treatment

A dentist offering NHS treatment may keep a list of regular patients and provide ongoing treatment but no longer has to keep a register of NHS patients.

To find out which local practices offer NHS treatment and are accepting new patients, you can:

- call NHS Direct and ask for a list of local practices and a local number to call if you have difficulty finding a dentist
- visit the NHS Choices website. Use your postcode or town to search for local practices and find out if they are accepting new adult patients. If you open the page describing a practice, it will feature a local number to call if you have difficulty finding a dentist.

Dentists offering NHS treatment produce a practice leaflet giving details of the NHS services they have agreed to provide.

See section 13 for information about NHS Direct and NHS Choices.

## 3 Check-up and treatment plans

The purpose of a check-up is to check your oral health – your mouth, teeth, gums and, if you wear them, the fit of your dentures. For adults, gum disease is a greater threat to teeth than tooth decay. Dentures usually need replacing at least every five years because the shape of your mouth changes over time.

A check-up is also an opportunity to discuss your oral health and risk factors that can increase your chance of gum disease and mouth cancer.

Smokers are at greater risk of gum disease than non-smokers. Most cases of mouth cancer are linked to tobacco and alcohol consumption, particularly if they are regularly consumed together. The tradition in some communities of chewing paan or tobacco is particularly dangerous. For more information about gum disease and mouth cancer, see section 13 for details of NHS Choices.

If you need treatment, ask the dentist to explain:

- what treatment you need and how many visits may be necessary
- your options if there is more than one way to treat the problem
- which of the three NHS charge bands the treatment falls into (see section 5)
- if private treatment for part or all of the treatment is proposed, what the estimated cost of the private treatment is.

Most dentists offer NHS and private treatment. If the dentist suggests private treatment as an alternative to NHS treatment and this procedure is available as NHS treatment, the dentist should not imply that it isn't. You should be told whether private treatment for a particular problem is your only option.

If you are to receive a mix of NHS and private treatment, you should be given a written treatment plan (including costs).

If you are unsure about the treatment proposed, you can ask to be referred for a second opinion. You may have to pay for a second opinion. If the second opinion is different, it is important to remember dentists have the right to disagree and prefer different options.

## 4 Frequency of check-ups

Guidance from the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) helps dentists decide how often patients should have a check-up.<sup>1</sup> For adults this could be between 3 and 24 months. If you have good oral health, it is likely to be between 12 and 24 months.

<sup>1</sup> *Dental recall – recall interval between routine general check-ups*. NICE October 2004  
[www.nice.org.uk/Guidance/CG19](http://www.nice.org.uk/Guidance/CG19)

Based on your oral health and the risk of future disease, you and your dentist should agree a date for your next check-up and record it in your notes at the end of a course of treatment. The rule that you must visit a practice at least every 15 months to 'stay on the register' no longer applies.

## 5 NHS charging system

The amount you pay depends on which band the most expensive part of your course of treatment falls into. You pay only one charge for each complete course even if more than one visit is necessary. The charges from 1 April 2010 are:

### ● **Band 1 – £16.50**

This charge covers an examination, diagnosis including x-rays, advice on how to prevent further problems, preventive care such as application of fluoride and a scale and polish.

### ● **Band 2 – £45.60**

This charge covers everything covered by Band 1 plus fillings, root canal work and any extractions. The charge is not affected by the number of fillings or extractions in your agreed course of treatment.

### ● **Band 3 – £198**

This charge covers everything covered by Bands 1 and 2 plus crowns, bridges or dentures.

**There is no charge** – for taking out stitches, stopping bleeding or writing an NHS prescription. Usual NHS charges apply to dispense the prescription.

**There is no charge** – for simple repairs to dentures. In addition, you are not usually charged if dentures require adjusting in the first few weeks after fitting.

**There is no charge** – if you need more treatment at the same charge level (for example another filling) within two months of seeing your dentist.

**Missed appointments** – dentists can no longer charge for missed appointments. However, if you continually miss appointments, they may not agree to treat you in future.

**Urgent or out-of-hours treatment** – charged at Band 1.

**Replacement of lost or accidentally damaged dentures** – £59.40, which is 30% of Band 3.

NHS treatment aims to 'secure and maintain oral health' and does not include treatment that is purely cosmetic such as large white fillings or white crowns on back teeth or tooth whitening. If you want this treatment you will have to have this as a private treatment.

## 5.1 Help with NHS charges

Entitlement to free NHS dental treatment or help towards the cost of treatment is based on your income and savings.

You are automatically entitled to free NHS treatment if you receive the **Guarantee Credit part of Pension Credit**. You need to show your award letter when you visit the dentist as proof of your entitlement.

If you are on a **low income and have savings of less than £16,000 (£23,250 if you live in a care home)** you may be entitled to full or partial help through the NHS Low Income Scheme (LIS).

The Department of Health leaflet: HC12 *A quick guide to help with health costs* tells you more about the LIS and how to apply (see section 12) Your dentist may also have a copy of this leaflet and an application form. The scheme is described in more detail in our Factsheet 61, *Help with health costs*.

If you receive Guarantee Credit or help through the LIS you are also entitled to help with other NHS costs. These include the cost of buying new glasses and, in some circumstances, the cost of travel to receive NHS treatment.

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**Note:** You cannot receive help with the cost of private treatment through the LIS or because you receive Guarantee Credit.

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## 6 Urgent and out-of-hours treatment

Urgent treatment can be offered for severe pain not eased by over-the-counter painkillers, an abscess or acute infection. Band 1 charges apply for any treatment you need to deal with the immediate problem.

Your regular dentist may offer urgent treatment during normal working hours. Outside normal working hours, call the surgery on the usual number and you should be told how to access urgent care.

If you don't have a regular dentist:

- NHS Direct has details of local out-of-hours services arranged by your Primary Care Trust (PCT)
- NHS Choices website also has this information. Enter your postcode or town to search for a dentist. Open the page on any local practice and you will find the number to call if you need urgent out-of-hours care.

See section 13 for information about NHS Direct and NHS Choices

## **7 Community dental services**

Each PCT provides a community dental service for people who may not otherwise seek or receive dental care. This includes people with learning difficulties, elderly housebound people and people with physical or mental health problems that make it difficult to receive treatment at a dental practice.

Your PCT Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) can explain who is eligible to use the local community dental service. NHS Direct has contact details for your local PCT PALS (see section 13).

## **8 Home visits**

If you find it difficult to visit a dentist because of a physical, mental or sensory disability, contact your PCT PALS. There may be local dentists who offer home visits or the community dental service may be recommended.

## **9 Dental care for care home residents**

If you live in a care home you should be able to make the same choices about your dental health as you made when living in your own home. Ask the care home manager what arrangements are in place to allow residents to see a dentist for regular or emergency care.

*The National Minimum Standards for Care Homes for Older People* describes standards that care homes must reach 'to meet the needs and secure the welfare of people who live there'.

Standard 8 addresses issues affecting residents' health-care needs and mentions the need to:

- maintain personal and oral hygiene
- support, where possible, residents' own capacity for self-care
- enable residents to have access to specialist dental services according to need.

Standard 8 also mentions the importance of good nutrition. To eat and enjoy a varied healthy diet, good oral health and, if dentures are worn, comfortable well-fitting dentures, is essential.

Lost dentures can be a problem for care home residents unable to clean their own dentures or during a hospital stay. They can be marked for easy identification, so ask your dentist about this.

The National Minimum Standards can be found on the Care Quality Commission website (see section 13).

## 10 **Registration of dentists and other dental professionals**

Dentists and a range of dental-care professionals must register with the General Dental Council (GDC) to practise in the UK. This range includes dental nurses, dental hygienists, dental technicians, clinical dental technicians, dental therapists and orthodontic therapists.

Dental hygienists and therapists have a role in promoting good dental health as well as working alongside the dentist.

Clinical dental technicians and dental technicians make dentures, bridges, crowns and braces.

You can check the GDC register to find out if a professional you propose to use is registered with them (see section 13 for GDC details).

The GDC has the power to investigate complaints against dental professionals, working privately or for the NHS, that call into question whether they should be able to remain on the register and continue to practise. For further information contact the GDC Customer Advice and Information Team (see section 13).

## 11 Complaints about NHS treatment

You can often resolve any concerns about your treatment by speaking to your dentist. If this does not resolve the problem, the practice should have a formal complaints procedure. A member of the practice team has responsibility for managing complaints and should explain the process to you.

If you prefer, you can raise concerns with or complain formally to the PCT responsible for NHS dentistry in the area. The local PCT PALS can help if you prefer this route. NHS Direct has details of local PCT PALS.

Age UK Factsheet 66, *Resolving problems and making complaints about NHS services* explains the process in more detail.

## 12 Private dental treatment

Some dentists only accept private patients. Others offer both NHS and private treatment.

Fees for private dental treatment are set by each practice, so it may be worth 'shopping around' to get a general idea of fees charged by several local practices. They may have a price list for relatively simple treatments but this won't give an indication of the quality of work or the cost of more complex work.

Some dentists offer different ways to pay for treatment. You may pay at the end of a course of treatment or take an insurance policy to cover the cost of treatment up to an agreed limit.

A capitation scheme involves having a dental assessment and paying a fixed monthly payment based on your expected level of treatment. Your dental needs and hence monthly payments are usually reviewed annually.

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**Note:** It is advisable to discuss your treatment options and ask for an estimated cost of the proposed treatment before going ahead. If expensive treatment is proposed you may want to go away and think about it or possibly seek a second opinion.

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## 12.1 Complaints about private treatment

The NHS complaints procedure does not cover private treatment, even if the dentist concerned also offers NHS treatment.

Practices will have their own complaints procedures so it may be advisable to ask about this when making your decision to join a practice.

If you are unable to resolve your complaint with the practice, you can approach the Dental Complaints Service operated by the GDC. They aim to look at less serious complaints and can be contacted by phone or in writing.

## 13 Useful organisations

### Care Quality Commission

The Care Quality Commission is the independent regulator of all health and adult social care services.

Finsbury Tower  
103-105 Bunhill Row  
London EC1Y 8TG

Tel: 0300 061 6161

Website: [www.organisation.org.uk](http://www.organisation.org.uk)

### Department of Health Publication orderline

Materials are available in large print and other formats and available in several languages. Delivery is within 10 working days.

Tel: 0300 123 1002

Email: [dh@prolog.uk.com](mailto:dh@prolog.uk.com)

Website: [www.organisation.org.uk](http://www.organisation.org.uk)

## **General Dental Council**

The General Dental Council is responsible for registering all dentists and other professionals who practise in the UK. You can find out if a professional is registered by searching the register on their website. If you do not have internet access you can call the registration department on 020 7344 3740.

37 Wimpole Street  
London W1G 8DQ

Customer Services: 0845 222 4141  
Website: [www.gdc-uk.org](http://www.gdc-uk.org)

## **GDC Dental Complaints Service**

The GDC Complaints Service assists private dental patients and dental professionals resolve complaints about private dental services.

The Lansdowne Building  
2 Lansdowne Road  
Croydon CR9 2ER

Complaints Helpline: 08456 120 540  
Website: [www.dentalcomplaints.org.uk](http://www.dentalcomplaints.org.uk)

## **NHS Choices**

NHS Choices is a comprehensive web information service to help you find and use NHS services, make choices about your health and learn more about the prevention and treatment of hundreds of health conditions. It also includes self management information to help those with long term conditions.

Website: [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

## **NHS Direct**

NHS Direct has contact details for your PCT and local services such as doctors, pharmacists, dentists and support groups. It also provides telephone and web advice on general health and common illnesses.

Tel: 0845 46 47  
Website: [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/)

## 14 Further information from Age UK

Visit the Age UK website, [www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk), or call Age UK Advice free on 0800 169 65 65 if you would like:

- to order copies of any of our information materials mentioned in this factsheet
- to request information in large print and audio
- further information about our full range of information products
- contact details for your nearest local Age UK/Age Concern.

### Books from Age UK

We publish a wide range of books for older people and those who care for and work with them. The following title may be of particular interest:

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#### Your rights to money benefits 2010–2011

All you need to know about the full range of benefits for the over 60s.  
£5.99

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To order this book visit [www.ageuk.org.uk/bookshop](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/bookshop) or to request a free books catalogue please call our book order line 0870 44 22 120 (lo-call rate).

## Age UK

Age UK is the new force combining Age Concern and Help the Aged. We provide advice and information for people in later life through our publications, online or by calling Age UK Advice.

Age UK Advice: 0800 169 65 65

Website: [www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)

In Wales, contact:

Age Cymru: 0800 169 65 65

Website: [www.agecymru.org.uk](http://www.agecymru.org.uk)

In Scotland, contact:

Age Scotland: 0845 125 9732

Website: [www.agescotland.org.uk](http://www.agescotland.org.uk)

In Northern Ireland, contact:

Age NI: 0808 808 7575

Website: [www.ageni.org.uk](http://www.ageni.org.uk)

## Support our work

Age UK is the largest provider of services to older people in the UK after the NHS. We make a difference to the lives of thousands of older people through local resources such as our befriending schemes, day centres and lunch clubs; by distributing free information materials; and through calls to Age UK Advice on 0800 169 65 65.

If you would like to support our work by making a donation please call Supporter Services on 0800 169 80 80 (8.30 am–5.30 pm) or visit [www.ageuk.org.uk/donate](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/donate)

## Legal statement

Age UK is a registered charity (number 1128267) and company limited by guarantee (number 6825798). The registered address is 207–221 Pentonville Road, London, N1 9UZ. VAT number: 564559800. Age Concern England (charity number 261794) and Help the Aged (charity number 272786) and their trading and other associated companies merged on 1 April 2009.

Together they have formed Age UK, a single charity dedicated to improving the lives of people in later life. Age Concern and Help the Aged are brands of Age UK. The three national Age Concerns in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales have also merged with Help the Aged in these nations to form three registered charities: Age Scotland, Age Northern Ireland, Age Cymru.

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