

Introducing eConsult – Overview and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is eConsult and how does it work?

eConsult is an online system that prompts patients to provide information that describes their current medical concern. Patients will be asked questions about their symptoms and it will only take a few minutes to complete. The completed form is called a health questionnaire.

After adding some personal details, to verify their identity, the eConsult system first uses built-in clinical knowledge to determine if help is needed more quickly than the Practice can provide e.g. emergency services. In these cases, the system will stop processing the request and suggest how to seek urgent medical advice. Otherwise the system submits the health questionnaire to the Practice where it is reviewed by our clinicians by the end of the next working day.

For example:

- If our clinicians decide that an appointment is needed, they will contact you to arrange this
- If a Fit Note is requested, an email or text will be sent to inform when this is ready for collection

Why are we using eConsult?

In response to feedback that we have received from patient surveys we have undertaken a comprehensive review of our appointment system. Patients told us they were waiting too long for an appointment with their GP and spend too long on the phone trying to make an appointment.

To improve the service we provide, one of the changes we are making is to introduce a system using eConsult.

eConsult may be completed at any time and from any device. It can be completed from the comfort of your own home, on a tea-break, or on the train to and from work. The review of the health questionnaire by a Clinician takes place during normal Surgery working hours.

If the condition can be managed without contacting the Surgery, eConsult can guide towards trusted medical advice as well as relevant local services, such as pharmacy support.

Requests made on eConsult may be clinical or administrative in nature. In many cases the condition may not generate the need for a face-to-face appointment. This frees-up more GP time and appointments for those that really need to see a GP.

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

We believe that eConsult will allow us to offer more convenient access to information and advice. It will also allow 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 less urgent needs.

How do I access eConsult?

eConsult will be available on the practice website (www.wallingbrook.co.uk) from any device and at any time of day.

On the home page of the practice website there is an eConsult icon which patients will need to select. Then, follow the instructions.

Depending on the patient responses, the patient may be asked to add some information about their condition and symptoms. These are the same questions the GP would ask in a normal appointment.

eConsult also includes a wealth of information on how to treat yourself. So, patients may be able to resolve their issue there and then.

At the end of the questions, upon submitting the questionnaire, the form will be received by the Surgery via this online system.

Once the form is submitted on eConsult, the patient will receive a copy via email. This email will contain the unique reference number relating to the form and is for possible future use in the event of the Surgery having to be contacted at a later date.

The Practice may respond in a variety of ways, based on information provided or the urgency of the condition:

- If appropriate, an appointment with a Clinician may be offered, either on the day or for a later date
- The patient may receive a phone call from the Surgery; this is because a face-to-face appointment may not be needed to resolve the issue. This will save a visit to the Surgery
- Patients may be referred directly for investigations or a hospital appointment to further investigate symptoms
- Patients may be directed to another Health Professional outside the Surgery, as they may be best placed to offer the advice or support needed.
- Patients may be directed towards the appropriate self-help advice

Note: At all times the Surgery will protect patient privacy and cannot discuss personal matters unless the Surgery is certain they are speaking to the correct patient, or someone authorised to speak on their behalf.

What if I can't or don't want to use the eConsult service?

For people unable to use or access eConsult the Patient Services team will complete the eConsult health questionnaire over the phone with the patient or patients can go to the surgery where support will be provided to support completion of the health questionnaire.

Please note: The fastest way to complete a request will be for the patient to do this themselves online. Once completed, whether online or on the phone, all requests will be reviewed by our clinicians in the same time frame. Method of contact is not given priority over another i.e. phoning a request will not mean patients are seen any quicker than if completed the request online themselves.

How will you benefit from eConsult?

- eConsult allows patients to seek advice from the Surgery or help manage their own condition or symptoms at all hours of the day, from any location.
- The service will make interacting with the Surgery more convenient. Patients may not have to come into the Practice to get help. This could avoid unnecessary leave from work or if feeling poorly at home, patients may avoid the discomfort of an unnecessary journey to the Surgery
- Patients will not have to queue on the telephone. They will simply complete the request online to tell the Surgery why help or advice is needed. The Surgery will respond if a face-to-face appointment is needed, and contact the patient to arrange this.
- If the problem can be treated without an appointment, it can save a trip to the Surgery. Instead a Clinician may contact the patient to discuss the next steps, arrange for tests before a face-to-face appointment, or organise a prescription for collection.
- Patients with the most urgent issues will be identified promptly. This is because the Surgery will already have an idea of why help is needed. This will improve safety by ensuring those who need help quickly get it
- A GP may not be the most appropriate person to see. eConsult assists the Surgery to identify the problem, determining the most appropriate member of staff to conduct the consultation.
- Using the information provided, together with knowledge built into eConsult and with a Clinician reviewing the questionnaire; a decision can be made on how urgently a patient needs to be seen.

Exceptions

Patients who fall into the following categories will need to continue to call the Surgery as they are currently doing:

- Nursing Team Appointments

Can I submit an eConsult for someone else?

Generally, patients using the eConsult service should submit requests based on their own symptoms or conditions.

As a parent or guardian of a child, you will be able to submit requests on eConsult about symptoms or conditions of their child as long as you are both patients of the practice.

In some cases people need help submitting their requests on eConsult. Friends and Family can assist in completing the form provided consent has been obtained.