



ageUK
Love later life

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1 Finding a dentist who offers NHS treatment

You can look for a dentist in your neighbourhood or further afield. Dental practices do not have catchment areas, so you can choose a practice convenient for you. To find practices offering NHS treatment, you can:

go to www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-dentist and enter a postcode. This flags local

2 NHS charging system

NHS treatment falls into one of three charging bands. The most expensive part of the course of treatment decides the band. The number of visits per course of treatment does not affect the charge.

Charges from 24 April 2024 are:

Band 1 – £26.80

This covers an examination, diagnosis including x-rays, advice on how to prevent further problems, a scale and polish if clinically needed.

Band 1 charges apply to urgent and out of hours care for any NHS treatment you need to deal with the immediate problem, which can usually be dealt with in one visit. If the dentist issues an NHS prescription, you must pay your usual charge.

Band 2 – £73.50

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

Band 3 – £319.10

This covers everything under Bands 1 and 2 plus crowns, bridges, and dentures.

There is no charge for taking out stitches, stopping bleeding, or writing an NHS prescription. Your usual NHS prescription charges apply.

There is no charge for simple denture repairs. You are not usually charged if dentures require adjusting in the first few weeks after fitting.

There is no charge for treatment needed in the same band or a lower band, within two calendar months of completing a course of treatment.

Scale and polish. If your dentist says scaling is '*clinically necessary*', it is available on the NHS. A simple scale is included in a Band 1 course of treatment. If you have more complex gum related problems, it may be charged within a band 2 course of treatment. If you *choose* to have a scale and polish, you must pay privately and can usually make an appointment directly with the hygienist.

Missed appointments cannot be charged for but if you continually miss appointments, the dentist may not agree to treat you in future.

Replacement of lost or accidentally damaged dentures, bridge or dental appliance is charged at 30 per cent of Band 3. This is £95.70.

Second opinions. You pay the initial dentist and second dentist a Band 1 charge for their consultations. Any treatment you subsequently agree to, is charged at the Band it falls into.

The NHS website offers information about treatment available in each treatment band.

3 Frequency of check-ups

Guidance from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) helps dentists to decide how often you need a check-up. For adults, this could be between three and 24 months, although is likely to be between 12 and 24 months if you have good teeth and gums.

At the end of a course of treatment and based on your oral health and risk of future disease, you and your dentist can agree a date for your next check-up. The dentist can record this in your notes.

Check
4 to 24 months.

Discussing your treatment needs and options

Before agreeing to proposed treatment, ask the dentist to explain:

treatment options for each problem, pros and cons of each, what each involves, its likely success, and reasons for their preferred option

whether there are NHS and private options and how they differ?

if the treatment is complex, how many times they have carried it out, and is the work guaranteed for any length of time?

what would happen if you do nothing or delay treatment?

how many visits you need to complete the course of treatment, and how much will it cost?

5 Community dental services

Many dentists can treat people with special needs. If you cannot use their premises because of a disability or medical condition, your dentist can refer you to a specialised dental service. This is usually provided by the community dental service at their own premises, a specialist health centre, mobile clinics, or home visits.

To find out about community dental services, contact your local ICB. They can explain local arrangements. Your local Healthwatch may be able to advise you.

6 Hospital dental services

Your dentist may refer you to the hospital dental service for further treatment, such as complex oral surgery, orthodontic treatment and oral cancer referrals. Dental charges do not apply to NHS secondary hospital dental care, but you may have to pay for any dentures or bridges.

7 Dental care for care home residents

Care homes should identify your personal care needs, agree with you how to meet them, and record this in your care plan. This includes oral health needs and whether you need support to maintain daily mouth care. If you need help or cannot clean your teeth, a local dentist or hygienist may provide guidance, so care staff know how to assist you.

Ask the care home

Note

You can only receive help with the cost of NHS treatment through entitlement to benefits mentioned above or the NHS LIS. There is no support towards private dental treatment costs.

Entitlement to help with other NHS costs

If you get help with dental costs because you receive certain benefits or have an HC2 or HC3 certificate, you are entitled to help with other NHS charged-for services.

You can get help with NHS prescriptions and sight tests (if you are not already exempt from paying for them), buying new glasses and, in some circumstances, the cost of travel to receive NHS treatment.

For information see factsheet 61, *Help with health costs*.

10 Private dental treatment

Some dentists offer NHS and private treatment, while others accept private patients only. There are no official guidelines for the cost of private treatment. Practices set their own fees, so you may want to shop around to get a general idea of fees charged locally. They may have a price list for relatively straightforward treatments, but this does not give an indication of, or reflect the quality of, their work.

It is advisable to ask how frequently the dentist carries out the proposed treatment and for a written estimate. **Agree fees before treatment starts.** Ask if there will be additional charges if there are complications and you need more treatment. If the dentist proposes expensive treatment, you may want to think about it or seek a second opinion.

Ways to pay

Dentists offer different ways to pay. You may be asked to join a dental plan or be able to choose to pay at the end of each course of treatment. You may be covered through current private medical insurance, or if opting for private treatment in the long term, decide to take out an insurance policy.

Dental plans can involve the dentist assessing your oral health, then setting a fixed monthly payment, based on the outcome. Maintenance plans offer preventative care and typically offer a set number of visits to the dentist and hygienist per year and emergency cover.

You may need to have your dental needs and hence monthly payments reviewed annually. Other plans might offer unlimited cover. Always read the terms and conditions of any plan or policy before signing up, so you know what is and is not included.

10.1 Compliments, concerns and complaints

Feedback, both positive and negative, helps practices understand patients' needs better, review their service and maintain high standards. If you have a concern about your treatment, you can often resolve it by speaking to your dentist without the need to make a formal complaint.

Practices have their own formal complaints procedure for private treatment. Ask about this when making your decision to join a practice or before starting private treatment. The NHS complaints procedure does not cover private treatment, even if your course of treatment has NHS and private elements to it.

If unable to resolve your concerns or complaint with the practice, you can approach the Dental Complaints Service (DCS) which is funded by, but independent of, the General Dental Council. The DCS looks at less serious complaints and can be contacted by phone or in writing. If your complaint relates to a dentist's fitness to practise, see section 12.

11 The role of the Care Quality Commission

All dental practices, dentists, and dental professionals who set up their own practice must register with the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

The CQC gathers information from various sources, including people who use the services and relevant health organisations. This informs the timings of their inspections, during which they look at whether the practice is safe, effective, caring, responsive and well-led.

Inspection reports are published on the CQC website, but they do not give practices a rating.

The CQC cannot investigate individual complaints but is interested to hear about patients' experience of care. This informs the regulation and future inspection of dental services. You can complete a '*share your experience form*' on their website.

12 Dentists and other dental professionals

The role of the General Dental Council

To practise in the UK, dentists and dental care professionals - dental nurses, dental hygienists, dental technicians, clinical dental technicians, dental therapists and orthodontic therapists - must register with the General Dental Council (GDC). You can view the GDC register online and search for registration details of practicing dental professionals. Registered professionals must abide by the GDC '*Standards for the dental team*'.

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Dental hygienists and therapists - have a role in promoting oral health and usually work alongside the dentist. Hygienists can provide thorough scaling and polishing, managing gum disease and applying topical fluoride and fissure sealants.

They may have training that allows them to offer tooth whitening under supervision of a dentist. Therapists can provide the same treatments as hygienists but may also perform other treatments such as fillings.

Dental technicians – make and repair appliances including dentures, bridges, crowns and braces to a dentist's prescription.

Clinical dental technicians – like dental technicians, make dental appliances. If you have no teeth (the technical term is '*edentulous*') and no implants, they can accept you directly for provision or maintenance of full dentures. Otherwise they must work to a dentist's prescription.

Orthodontic therapists - work alongside orthodontists (specialist dental practitioners) and can carry out a limited range of treatments and procedures to straighten and improve the alignment of teeth.

The GDC has information on its website about the standard of care you should expect from your dental professional, tooth whitening, dental charges and going abroad for dental treatment.

Safety concerns and 'Fitness to practise' complaints

The GDC can investigate a complaint against a dental professional working for the NHS or privately, where there are reasons to question whether their work falls seriously short of acceptable standards.

This might arise due to provision of very poor quality treatment, safety issues related to poor hygiene practice, inappropriate behaviour, fraud,

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