

# Hospital visits about your skin condition

## How to make the most of your time with a doctor or nurse

No matter what the reason for your visit, thinking ahead and doing a little preparation can help you to get the most from your outpatient appointment and assist you and your dermatology team in planning your care and treatment.

Whether this is your first appointment or you have had several appointments already, this short guide can help you prepare for your consultation.

You may receive your appointment by letter, phone or text. Keep these details safe, and consider marking the date on a wall calendar or put a reminder on your phone.



### Before your appointment: 7 ways to make things easier



Prepare a list of questions you would like to ask your doctor or nurse.



It may be helpful to bring a list of any creams or ointments that you are applying, and/or tablets or injections that you are currently taking, along with details of how long you are using them and response to treatment. Sometimes, it might be useful to check with your pharmacist if it is possible to print a list of your most up-to-date prescribed medicines. Another helpful tip is to take photographs of the creams/ointments and tablet containers with your phone, so you can show them to the doctor or nurse.



If you are using topical preparations such as creams/ointments/lotions/mousse, your doctor or nurse may ask how long a tube/container/canister is lasting you. Try to keep in mind when you started using the preparation, and how much and how often it is being applied. This can help the doctor or nurse understand if the treatment is suiting you and guide their assessment about whether the strength and quantity is appropriate for you.



You may wish to bring a pen and paper to make notes as a reminder of what the doctor or nurse said during the consultation.



If you feel that you would like extra support, and if appropriate, you may consider asking a family member or friend to attend with you.



If it is your first appointment at a hospital or clinic, it is often a good idea to look up its location and plan how to get there. It may also be helpful to check local transport options or parking arrangements.



Some people find it helpful to take photos of their skin condition (especially when their skin condition flares), to show them to their doctor or nurse during their consultation. Sometimes a flare has subsided by the time your appointment takes place, so it can be useful to show your doctor or nurse what your skin looked like during the flare.





## On the day of your appointment:

1. It may be useful to bring some or all of these items to your outpatient appointment: appointment letter, medical card (if you have one), contact details e.g. your own mobile phone number and next of kin, GP name and address.
2. Allow plenty of time for your visit, as other appointments may overrun.
3. Check in and register at the appropriate location e.g., reception, kiosk and/or department at the time you have been given.
4. Check your appointment details to see if you have been asked to arrive a few minutes before your appointment time.



## During your appointment:

1. A member of your dermatology team will introduce themselves to you if you do not know them already.
2. During your appointment, your healthcare professional may talk about: your medical history, your symptoms, your response to treatment (where appropriate), whether you may need tests (e.g. blood tests, a skin biopsy) or receive results for any tests you have already had.
3. It is important to tell the healthcare professional about your current medications (including any complementary or alternative treatments that you might be taking), if you have any allergies and if you are pregnant.
4. Report any symptoms such as itch, pain, burning or stinging as well as anything else that may be worrying you. It is also important to mention any recent infections or illness.
5. In dermatology practice, it is common for your doctor or nurse to perform a full skin examination, to help in their assessment of your condition. Try not to feel shy or embarrassed if your skin condition is present in a sensitive/intimate area. It is important to discuss all areas affected, so that it can be treated effectively.
6. In dermatology clinics, healthcare professionals often use special assessment/measurement aids to help make a visual estimate of the severity and extent of your condition. Some examples of these aids include the Psoriasis Area and Severity Index (PASI), Eczema Area and Severity Index (EASI), and the Hurley staging system in the case of Hidradenitis Suppurativa. These types of measurement aids assist healthcare professionals in their initial and ongoing assessments, including monitoring response to treatment and informing decisions around the most appropriate management of different types of skin conditions.
7. Living with a skin condition can affect people in different ways, so your doctor or nurse may ask you to fill out a questionnaire such as the Dermatology Life Quality Index (DLQI), before or during your consultation. This questionnaire consists of 10 simple questions and aims to measure how much your skin condition has affected your health-related quality of life over the last week. This questionnaire is a good opportunity to express how your skin condition is affecting you day-to-day, physically, emotionally, socially and sexually, so try to be as honest as you can when answering the questions and don't be afraid to say how you really feel.
8. Discuss and identify your treatment goals with your dermatology team, so together you can decide a plan for ongoing care and treatment.
9. If you are having difficulty understanding anything that is being said, it is important to say this to your health care professional. It is okay to ask them to explain or clarify something again, or write it down for you.
10. Remember to ask any questions that you have prepared in advance, or similarly anything that may have arisen during the consultation.



## Systemic and biologic treatments

People attending hospital appointments for a skin condition may be prescribed systemic or biologic treatments (tablets or injections). With ongoing scientific advances, there are new developments in dermatology every year, your doctor is best placed to discuss these with you.

It is natural to have questions about a new (or change in) treatment, including any concerns about possible side effects. Both doctors and specialist nurses in dermatology can help with these questions.



## At the end of your appointment

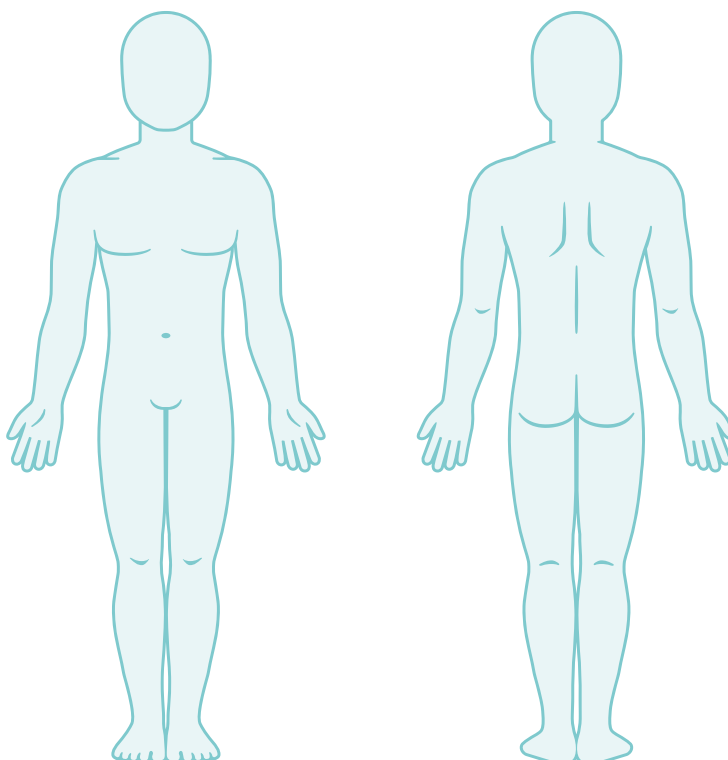
1. Ensure you understand the information shared during your consultation including any next steps or plans for further treatment.
2. Double check your treatment plan, your prescription and if there is a need for follow-up tests e.g. blood tests.
3. If your treatment plan involves applying topical preparations to your skin e.g. creams/ointments etc., ensure you understand the strength of the preparation, where on the body it is to be applied, the quantity (how much applied on each application) and for how long (duration of use).
4. Ask for a contact name and number of someone you can contact in the department, in case you have further questions about your treatment.
5. If you are due to come back for another appointment, clarify when this will be, so that you know when to expect to be reviewed again.
6. If clinics are scheduled in the morning and it's difficult to attend an early slot e.g. due to a long commute, ask if there is a possibility to choose a later appointment time towards the end of clinic.
7. If for any reason you are unable to attend your appointment, it is important that you contact the hospital/clinic as soon as possible to cancel and reschedule your appointment.



## Body map: What areas of your skin do you want to talk about at your appointment?

Skin conditions can affect any part of your body. This includes your hair, scalp, ears, nails, genitals, sensitive areas, the palms of your hands and soles of your feet.

You may find it useful to mark or shade in this body map, to help indicate the areas of your body affected by your skin condition, to aid your discussion with your doctor or nurse during your next appointment.



What would I like to achieve during my appointment? (My appointment date and time is: \_\_\_\_\_)

Questions that I would like to ask my doctor or nurse

Notes

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The ISF is a national charity dedicated to improving quality of life for people living with skin conditions.

We promote skin health and the prevention of skin disease by providing support, independent information, engaging in advocacy and raising awareness.

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