

what is a general practitioner

(and what can i expect)?

What is a general practitioner (GP)?

GPs are doctors trained to help you with any type of physical or mental health issue.

You can visit a GP if you're concerned about:

- sexual health and contraception
- alcohol and other drug use
- relationship problems
- your mood or worrying thoughts
- your sleep, appetite or ability to concentrate
- other physical and mental health concerns.

You can visit a GP for free and your health issues are kept private.

How do I find a doctor?

To find a GP you can ask a friend, family member or someone you know who they recommend or drop in to a medical centre and ask about what services they offer. Schools, TAFEs and universities also often know about local GPs and sometimes even have their own medical services. Start by asking a wellbeing staff member if you aren't sure how to access these services.



A quick search on [healthdirect.gov.au](https://www.healthdirect.gov.au) can help you find a GP nearby.

A family GP can be a good place to start if you need some help and feel comfortable talking to them. Even if they know your family, a GP is still required to keep your information private. If you're worried about this you should talk to them.

You can also contact your nearest headspace centre, which might have GPs and can also connect you with other health workers if needed.

How do I book an appointment?

- Many GPs have online bookings, to book a GP appointment online you can start with **[healthengine.com.au](https://www.healthengine.com.au)**. You can also phone or drop into a medical centre to see a GP.
- You will need to provide your contact information, but you don't need to explain what the problem is if you don't want to.
- If you have more than two things to discuss, or want a mental health care plan, book a longer appointment.
- If you feel uncomfortable going by yourself, bring someone you trust – your doctor won't mind at all.

You might find that some GPs don't have appointment times for new patients. Let them know if it's an urgent problem and they may be able to provide other options.

How much will a GP appointment cost?

Many GPs provide 'bulk billed' services (free appointments covered by Medicare) to young people and people with Health Care Cards. This is usually the case with headspace GPs. Sometimes your GP might charge a 'gap' fee, which is an extra cost you will need to pay. If you're worried about this, check the costs when you book your appointment.

To be bulk billed, you'll need to have a Medicare card or know your Medicare number (if you don't know this, ask reception when you book your appointment, and they can help).

If you are listed on a joint Medicare card, you can use that card. This appointment may be listed on the Medicare record for that card – which means your parent(s)/guardian may be able to see that you've had an appointment. Although the appointment will be visible for the card owner, what you speak about is still kept private.

If you're an Australian resident or citizen and 15 years of age or older you can have your own Medicare card. Having your own card means that you can keep your visits to the doctor confidential. For more information or to apply for your own card go to humanservices.gov.au/individuals/medicare

Advice from our headspace clinicians

- Standard GP appointments usually take between 10-15 minutes. A longer appointment will take 20-25 minutes.
- First appointments with GPs at headspace centres are usually longer than a standard appointment. You might be seen by another health worker, too – depending on what you need to speak about.
- The GP will ask a range of questions about your health and may want to do a physical check-up, like blood pressure, heart rate and temperature, or examine other parts of your body relevant to your problem.
- A GP can't do any sort of examination without explaining why it's necessary, what will happen and getting your permission.
- The GP will then discuss the concern with you and talk about what you can do next. Ask your GP questions about your health problem so you know exactly what's going on. Try to be open and honest about your concerns and situation so that you can make a plan together.
- Don't be embarrassed to ask questions if you don't understand something. Your GP is there to help you and has seen all sorts of people and problems. If you think you will forget or feel too awkward, write down your concerns before the appointment and give this to your GP.

What are my rights to privacy?



If you're not feeling comfortable and safe with your GP, it's OK for you change to another and ask them to transfer your medical records.

By law, all GPs (and any clinical staff working with the GP) have to keep information about their patients private. This means they can't discuss your visit with anyone else, with a few exceptions. If a GP thinks you're likely to harm yourself or someone else, they have a duty of care to make sure you stay safe, so they may need to tell other people.

The only other time a doctor will release your information is if ordered to do so by a court, but this is rare.

If you want to know more about your rights to privacy and confidentiality, ask your GP at your next appointment.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit headspace.org.au



If you need immediate assistance call 000 or to speak to someone urgently, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.

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