

Group Clinics

Patient Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What are group clinics?

A: Group clinics are a way for you to join people with similar health issues and consult with your GP or nurse for longer. You may also see consultants, pharmacists, social prescribers and health coaches in this way. They are also known as group consultations or shared medical appointments. We are currently trialling this new method of offering you healthcare and welcome your feedback.

Q: How will I benefit from a group clinic?

A: People who have participated in group clinics say that they enjoy hearing from other people in a similar situation and having longer to talk about their worries. They say they enjoy sharing their concerns, what has worked for them and what doesn't but also hearing from other people's success. They report feeling a sense of belonging and that they are no longer alone in trying to manage their condition such as asthma, diabetes or depression.

Q: Can I still have a one to one consultation?

A: Yes, practices will always offer face to face appointments and one to one appointments. Group clinics are used as an extra way to support those who want to join in.

Q: What happens in a group clinic?

A: You will be welcomed by a member of your GP practice team who will act as a facilitator. The facilitator will start the session by reminding everyone in the group to keep information confidential.

They will then explain how the session will flow and each member of the group (often 6-8 participants) will introduce themselves. You will have time to review and understand the results you have agreed to share such as blood pressure, cholesterol etc and come up with questions for your clinician who will join the group and have one to one consultations with each member. During this time people often join in and share ideas and problem-solve together. The facilitator will wrap up after 60-90 minutes and you might want to set goals for yourself.

Following the group clinic you may want to make a one to one appointment to go through anything you didn't want to share in the group situation or your clinician may want to arrange follow-up tests or referrals.

Q: How do I know a group clinic is for me?

A: You can talk to your practice facilitator or to your own GP or nurse to find out more and check any concerns you might have. Group consultations might not suit everyone, if you are feeling anxious beforehand, let the facilitator know. It is OK to join a group just to listen and see if it is for you. Some people may even join in and decide to leave if it isn't right for them. At any point you can leave a group and book a one-to-one appointment later.

Q: Can I have my yearly health check in a group clinic?

A: Yes, many practices are offering the choice of having your yearly health check in a 90-minute group rather than a 20-minute appointment. You must have had your initial appointment with a HealthCare assistant for blood tests, blood pressure checks and other monitoring before attending the clinic so that the practice have your up-to-date test results.

Q: What happens if I change my mind when I'm in a group clinic?

A: If you feel a group clinic isn't working for you, let the facilitator know and you can leave and book a one-to-one appointment later on. Feed-back will be collected after every clinic so let your facilitator know if you think things could be improved.

Q: Can patients form their own groups after a group clinic?

A: Yes, some patients find that it is helpful to create support groups outside of the surgery to help each other stick to goals for example. Some practices might be able to support you to do this.

Q: Can my partner, friend or carer join me in my group clinic?

A: Yes, with your agreement. It is often very useful for carers or family members to join in. They will need to agree to confidentiality and confirm their identity just like other participants. Ideally you should keep to just one extra member or groups can get too large.

Q: Can I record my group session?

A: No, to ensure all information shared in the session is kept confidential and your privacy respected, you will be asked to adhere to the 'Group Clinic Patient Agreement'. This asks you not to record, share or post any aspect of the session. It's in everyone's interest to respect this.

Q: What happens if I don't want to say anything in a group clinic?

A: Let your facilitator know if you are feeling worried about being in a group. It is OK to join a group to listen. Many people do this and end up joining in once they feel comfortable.

Q: What happens if I am late joining my group?

A: You may not be allowed to join the group as it is important that everyone has agreed at the start to confidentiality and confirms their identity. It also disrupts the group for others. You may be asked to book into another group clinic or one to one appointment.

Q: How is my health information kept confidential during a group?

A: All participants are requested to agree to a behavioural contract before they enter a group. This states that they agree not to share any information discussed within the group. Unlike the confidentiality regulations surrounding a doctor's obligation to keep all information confidential, this is not enforceable by law. However, as a behavioural contract it is repeated throughout the group session and as all participants will be sharing personal information, it is thought that the chances of a confidentiality breach are low.

Your practice will ask your consent to share limited information about your condition that relates to the group topic. This information will be shared with the group in the form of a results board. For example, in a diabetes group this might include blood glucose levels, blood pressure and cholesterol.

Any other questions?

If you have other questions or if you have been to a group and want to add to this list of questions to help other patients please get in touch with your practice manager through your practice website. Thank you.