

# Urgent Bowel Clinic Referrals

This information sheet explains why your GP has referred you to hospital and what you need to do. If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

## Why have I been referred urgently to hospital?

Your GP feels your bowel symptoms need further investigation to rule out the possibility of cancer. You can expect to be seen quickly to find out what is wrong with you.

## Does this mean I have bowel cancer?

There are many common bowel conditions to which your symptoms could be linked, including the possibility of cancer. Most people who have an urgent referral do not have cancer. However, it is important to attend your appointment because if cancer is diagnosed, ensuring a diagnosis is made early means treatment is likely to be more effective.

**Because this referral is urgent, you will be offered an appointment with the hospital within two weeks but it may be earlier. You may need to be available for further tests over the next four weeks.**

## What do I need to do?

- Your GP may have asked you to do a “poo” test called ‘FIT’ (Faecal Immunochemical Test) as part of the investigation of your symptoms. This test looks for the presence of blood in the stools (poo) where it is in amounts too small to be visible. Read through the accompanying instructions carefully before you complete the test and return this to your GP practice as soon as possible.
- Make sure your GP has your correct address and telephone number including a mobile number if you have one as the hospital may contact you by telephone.
- If you are unable to attend appointments within the next four weeks, please tell your GP.
- If you require a translator, have access needs or would like a female consultant, please let the hospital know when they contact you.
- If you have not received an appointment from the hospital within two weeks, please contact your GP practice. Alternatively, if you know the hospital to which you have been referred, you can contact their Patient Advice and Liaison Services (PALS) department.
- If you feel your symptoms or condition are worsening, then it is very important that you contact your GP surgery to discuss.

## What will happen at my appointment?

Depending on your symptoms you will be offered one of the following:

1. **A face to face out-patient appointment to see a specialist.** The hospital will contact you and agree an appointment to attend the clinic. Be prepared that these appointments may take a few hours depending on waiting times and which tests you require.
2. **A telephone assessment** with a specially trained Colorectal nurse to find out more about your symptoms and advise the best test for you. They will also talk to you about what they think might be causing your symptoms.  
Please note: You must notify the clinician if you intend to record the call or include a friend or family member on the call. **Please note that when the hospital calls you, a “No caller ID” may appear in your phone display monitor. Please be advised to answer this call.**
3. **In some instances, the hospital may offer to send you straight for a test without the need for an assessment first.** This may occur if there are no other health conditions to take into consideration when planning tests. The investigation may involve a camera examination of the bowel (endoscopy) or a CT scan / colonography. Further details of the investigation will be provided when the hospital contacts you. The department that will carry out investigating your symptom will contact you to confirm the time and the date of your appointment. It is at this stage that you will be informed what you need to do, if anything, to prepare for the test. With this type of appointment, you will not be seen by the specialist team in the clinic or assessed by a specialist nurse first, so please follow the instructions carefully.

We know that talking about your bowels can be embarrassing but members of the specialist bowel team (also known as the Colorectal Team) accustomed to this subject. Try not to feel embarrassed or uncomfortable about discussing your symptoms or asking questions. Don't be afraid to use the terms that you usually use for your bowels such as “poo”.

You will be contacted about the outcome of your tests within 28 days of your referral. In some cases, the hospital will be able to tell you there and then what they think has been causing your symptoms and offer you treatment straight away or refer you on for treatment.

Please contact the hospital if you have not heard anything within a few weeks of your test. You may want to bring a friend or family member with you to appointments, as it may be helpful for support or if you have concerns about understanding what the medical team will discuss with you. Please check your appointment letter for guidance about visitors.

## What test am I likely to need?

Different tests give us different information about you and your bowels. The most common tests that the bowel team uses are:

- Flexible Sigmoidoscopy
- Colonoscopy
- CT Colonography
- CT scan
- MRI scan
- Ultrasound scan.

These tests are explained by the department which will carry out your tests. You are likely to be sent for one (or sometimes more) of these tests. The department where the tests are carried out will then send you an appointment letter and more information about the test, including the risks and benefits of the test and information on how to prepare your bowel for the test.

## **What if I choose not to have the tests that are recommended?**

You can discuss this with the Colorectal Specialist at your telephone assessment or face to face appointment. If you still do not feel you want to proceed with the tests you should then discuss this with your GP.

## **Useful tips before your appointment**

These are the questions you may be asked at your telephone or face to face assessment appointment, so it will be helpful if you can prepare your answers in advance.

## **Your symptoms**

- What has been happening with your bowels?
- How long have the symptoms been going on?
- Are they continuous or do they come and go?
- Is there a pattern? E.g., same time of day, before or after meals etc.

## **Change in your lifestyle**

- Have you changed your diet or exercise?
- Have you recently felt stressed?
- Have you been overseas lately?
- Have your friends, family or colleagues had similar problems?
- Are you on any new medication?

## **Your medical history**

- Have you had any bowel or digestive problems in the past?
- Have you had any operations?
- Do you have any cardiac (heart) past medical history?
- Do you take any blood thinning medicines?
- Are you diabetic? If so, do you take tablets or insulin?

## Family medical history

- Have any of your family members had cancer, especially bowel cancer?
- Have any of your family members had a bowel disorder e.g., Crohn's disease or colitis? Your personal circumstances
- Do you live alone?
- How mobile are you / do you need help getting around?
- What support do you have around you?
- Are you currently working?
- Do you have any special communication needs?
- Do you have any transport issues?

## Finally, remember

Most people with bowel symptoms do not have cancer but it is important to have your symptoms checked out. The cause is often something minor, like piles or irritable bowel syndrome. If you are unsure or do not understand something you are told, **PLEASE ASK**.

## Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your symptoms, please contact St. George's Direct-to-test on 07766 442 049 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm). We do not work on weekends.

## Useful sources of information

Bowel Cancer UK

<https://www.bowelcanceruk.org.uk/about-bowel-cancer/diagnosis/visiting-your-gp/>

Macmillan Cancer Support 0808 808 0000

Cancer Research UK 0808 800 404

**For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments, and services offered at our hospitals, please visit [www.stgeorges.nhs.uk](http://www.stgeorges.nhs.uk)**

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## Additional Services

### Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or care. You can contact the PALS team on the advisory telephone line Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 2pm to 5pm.

A Walk-in service is available:

Monday, Tuesday and Thursday between 10am and 4pm

Friday between 10am and 2pm.

Please contact PALS in advance to check if there are any changes to opening times.

The Walk-in and Advisory telephone services are closed on Wednesdays.

PALS is based within the hospital in the ground floor main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough wings.

**Tel:** 020 8725 2453 **Email:** [pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk)

### **NHS UK**

The NHS provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

**Web:** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

### **NHS 111**

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

**Tel:** 111

### **AccessAble**

You can download accessibility guides for all our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website ([www.accessable.co.uk](http://www.accessable.co.uk)). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



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