# Patient Information Policies

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**New Patient Acceptance Policy**

We accept all Private and NHS fee-paying patients. However, this is subject to capacity.

The practice does not refuse to treat anyone on the grounds of:

- Race
- Religion
- Gender
- Sex
- Age
- Sexual orientation
- Appearance
- Disability
- Medical or Dental Condition

We offer NHS-exempt treatments for the following categories:

- Patients who claim low-income benefits and this is decided by the government;
- Children under 18 years of age;
- Patients who are under 19 years of age and in full-time education;
- Patients who are pregnant or have had a baby within the last 12 months.

If you don't belong to the above categories, you will be classified as a fee-paying patient.

NHS patients must sign a form at the beginning and end of each treatment. All patients exempt from paying NHS fees will be asked to show proof of benefit received.

**Note:** You will not be exempt from paying because you receive: Incapacity Benefit, contribution-based Employment and Support Allowance, contribution-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Disability Living Allowance, Council Tax Benefit, Housing Benefit or Pension Credit savings credit, when paid on their own. Medical conditions do not exempt you from payment for dental treatment. There are several changes regarding Universal Credit and Tax credit which may change your eligibility to claim an exemption from paying for dental treatment, you are responsible for checking your eligibility.

**Continuity of Care**

You will be advised which dentist you will see when you book your first appointment.

In subsequent appointments, you will be offered the first available dentist unless you request a particular dentist. We will try our best to accommodate you.

Sometimes we may have only one dentist. However, if we must place a locum dentist on that day (e.g., illness, holidays), you will be advised of this change.

### NHS Registration and Waiting List Policy

Due to the high demand for NHS dental treatment and our limited capacity, keeping up to date with your regular dental appointments is essential to remaining an active patient. Any patient who has not attended for over two years will be removed from our current NHS patient list and may need to join a waiting list.

We recommend booking the next appointment before you leave the practice to ensure you don't forget. We will aim to remind patients of their upcoming appointments via email, but failure to receive a reminder cannot excuse you from missing an appointment as it is your responsibility to maintain your appointments. It is also recommended that you keep us informed if your contact details change, such as when you move house, so that our communications are received.

### Access & Emergency Treatment Policy

{Practice Name} is open to treat patients during the following hours:

Monday: 9.30-13.00 & 14.00-17.00

Tuesday: 9.30-13.00 & 14.00-17.00

Wednesday: 9.30-13.00 & 14.00-17.00

Thursday: 9.30-13.00 & 14.00-17.00

Friday: 9.30-13.00 & 14.00-17.00

Saturday: By Appointment only

Patients who feel they have a dental emergency will be assessed at the point of contact (either over the telephone or face-to-face at reception). The practice is under no obligation to see patients with toothache. Toothache is not classed as an emergency (see below for emergency definitions).

At {Practice Name}, we will endeavour to see patients with pain, swelling or trauma within 48 hours of initial contact, where possible. This applies to patients who attend examinations regularly. If we are working at full capacity at any given time, we will manage the patient and refer them to another service if necessary.

Patients undergoing treatment who have pain or swelling will be offered an appointment within 24 hours of initial contact.

During out-of-hours, an answer phone message advises patients of help available. Everyone can access help and advice 24 hours a day through the NHS 111 service. Details will also be displayed at the entrance to the practice. This information will always be correct and up to date.

**Definition of emergency**

**Fractured jaws** – affects speech, teeth may not meet properly, swelling inside mouth, limited mobility, pain etc. Most commonly happens after an accident, blow to the chin etc.

**Uncontrolled Bleeding -** Any bleeding that cannot be controlled by firm continuous pressure from a pack for 10 minutes may need suturing. This most commonly happens after an extraction or due to an infection, alcohol, aspirin, drugs, etc.

**Loss of consciousness –** No matter how brief, anyone who was unresponsive may have suffered internal brain damage that could worsen if left without investigation. Most commonly happens after a blow to the head or accident.

### Cancellations, Failed and Missed Appointments

It is inevitable that sometimes you may need to cancel or rearrange your dental appointments.

We ask patients to give as much notice as possible (48 working hours) when cancelling an appointment so we have the opportunity to offer it to someone else. Although we understand that during an emergency, this is not always possible, non-attendance and cancellations at short notice without a valid reason deprive other patients of our services.

Appointments are often wasted as people do not attend. Over 20 appointments per month are being wasted. Other patients could have used these appointments.

The first time a patient fails to attend a booked appointment, we will send an e-mail reminding them that they must cancel appointments if they cannot attend in the future.

After 2 appointments where the patient failed to attend or cancelled last minute, we will advise you that we will no longer be able to book further appointments as an NHS patient where applicable or if you are a private patient, we shall need prior payment to secure the appointment.

An appointment is considered to have been broken if any of the following occur:

- the patient fails to show up for the appointment,
- the patient appears more than 20 minutes late for a scheduled appointment or

- the patient calls to cancel an appointment with too little advance notice to allow that appointment time to be rescheduled with another patient (48 working hours will be considered the minimum time necessary to avoid a broken appointment).

Patients who wish to cancel dental appointments must do so at least 48 working hours before the appointment. If less notice is given without a valid excuse, the appointment will be considered to have been broken.

If more than 2 NHS dental appointments are missed or cancelled with less than 48 working hours' notice (1 if you are a new patient), we do not guarantee to be able to complete a patient's NHS treatment or offer them NHS treatment in the future. If the length of appointment is greater than 35 minutes and is missed or cancelled with less than 48 working hours' notice. We reserve the right to ask a patient to find another dental practice.

If you are a private patient at the practice and you miss your appointment or cancel at short notice, we reserve the right to keep your deposit or charge a fine to cover the cost of the appointment.

## Cancellations due to illness

If you are showing symptoms of a stomach bug or a respiratory illness, including COVID, please let us know so we can rearrange your appointment for when you are feeling better. This also helps to keep our staff and other patients safe. The standard cancellation period may not apply in these circumstances.

### Cold Sore Policy

Cold sores are common for many people in the UK. Like all viruses, they are contagious and pose a risk to others. The herpes simplex virus is spread through contact.

Cold sores usually emerge as a small ulcer-like patch on or surrounding the lip line. They can appear in a matter of hours and, depending on the severity, typically take between seven days and four weeks to heal. From the time they begin to emerge to the point at which they are fully healed, they pose a contagion risk.

At {Practice Name}, we ask patients that if they have had a cold sore for less than 2 weeks, please reschedule any non-emergency dental treatment or hygienist appointments until after this contagious period has passed. This is not only because of the high risk of spreading the virus but also because your lips may feel sore and could crack or bleed during treatment.

If urgent dental treatment is required (you are in pain and need immediate attention), our dentists will request that your cold sore be protected with a cold sore plaster to minimise the risk of cross-infection during emergency dental treatment.

If you do get a cold sore and you have a dental or hygienist appointment arranged, please call the practice with as much notice as possible to reschedule any non-emergency treatment. You will not be charged a late cancellation fee if you cancel due to a cold sore.

## Drugs and Alcohol Policy

The safety of our staff and patients is of utmost importance.

Treating patients who are under the influence of drugs or alcohol can be dangerous for several reasons, including:

- difficulty in gaining informed consent

- the possibility that post-operative instructions will be forgotten
- increased bleeding risk

If we suspect a patient is chemically impaired, either through alcohol or drugs, including prescription drugs, which may cause impairment, we will be unable to treat the patient and will ask to reschedule the appointment.

### Patient Involvement Policy

We actively involve all our patients in every aspect of their dental care, and as a practice, we aim to carry out the following;

- To ensure discussions take place in an environment where conversations are not overheard, and every effort is made to ensure the patient feels comfortable and relaxed.
- To identify whether communication aids are required, including the use of interpreters, to ensure that the patient fully understands explanations and discussions and can make informed choices.
- To identify patient treatment needs and treatment options, as well as what they can do to manage their care.
- To discuss all care and treatment options, providing enough information on any risks involved and potential consequences of each option and, where possible, identifying relevant evidence, research, or experience.
- Record discussions in the patient's notes identifying the treatment needs, options discussed and patient's choice.
- To record the reason for and outcome of diagnostic tests and assessments are explained to the patient. These include radiographs, vitality tests, periodontal indices, and pathology tests.
- To ensure all staff at the practice understand the principles of patient confidentiality and routinely follow the practice procedure for ensuring the confidentiality of patient information.

### Code of Good Practice Policy

At {Practice Name}, we listen to and learn from patients' views. We communicate with patients in a courteous, friendly, professional manner.

Patients receive the standard of care we would expect to receive ourselves, and we ensure that they receive full information about our services, their treatment, and its cost.

We may refer patients for further professional advice and treatment where appropriate, and we are committed to maintaining our professional skills and knowledge.

**In our practice, we will:**

- Respect our patients' confidentiality
- Aim to ensure that patients should have to wait no longer than 20 minutes to be seen unless there are extenuating circumstances.
- Deal with every telephone call promptly
- Deal with correspondence within three working days of receipt.
- Provide patients with a treatment plan and estimate costs for each new course of treatment. Full and specific consent will be gained.
- Make patients aware of our policy for collecting fees. Payment requests will always be made courteously.

- Patients will be informed of the practice policy for dealing with complaints. All complaints will be treated sympathetically and according to the agreed-upon procedures.
- Provide the highest standards of infection control
- Provide any emergency treatment required during practice hours as soon as is reasonably practicable.

### Practice Payment & Charges Policy

We will give patients complete information about the cost of their dental care before any treatment is undertaken.

A list of common treatment charges is available at reception for treatments that are provided privately.

To book an appointment with the hygienist or a private appointment, we require a deposit of £40. This will count towards the treatment session.

We also aim to take a deposit for all treatments to secure your appointment. The deposit will be lost if you miss your appointment or fail to let us know within 48 working hours if you are cancelling.

**We will ensure that all patients:**

- Are advised of what they must pay, when they should pay and how they can pay (e.g. cash, card, direct transfer)
- Know what they will receive for their payment (i.e. what treatment or care)
- Understand their treatment is provided privately
- Are given a written estimate and treatment plan on request or where treatment involves more than routine preventive examination and hygiene care
- Understand their responsibilities in terms of payment terms and how to avoid any penalty for overdue fees (missed appointment charges, late payment, etc.)
- Are not pressured into signing agreements or paying fees
- Obtain a receipt for any payments they make and can review their account details
- Can talk to a staff member who can explain clearly what payments are due and what they are for
- Can discuss with staff what treatment options and costs are available
- Are given an estimate where a precise cost cannot be determined in advance (e.g. laboratory work) and will receive timely advice of any additional costs where appropriate

We try to make payment as straightforward as possible.

### Payment & Refund Policy

**Payment Method**

All major debit and credit cards are accepted. We also accept cash and bank transfer.

**Change of Details**

You must inform the practice immediately of any changes to your contact details. Failure to do so will mean that we are not able to provide you with essential information and updates.

**Cancellation of Courses of Treatment**

If, for any reason, a course of treatment is cancelled, then we will make every reasonable effort to give the patient as much notice as possible. {Practice Name}'s maximum liability will be limited to a refund of the advance payment fee ONLY. Refunds will be made using the method used to make the treatment booking. We will not accept liability for any additional costs or losses incurred by a patient or organisation which are claimed to have arisen through treatment cancellation. We reserve the right to vary arrangements for the delivery of a treatment plan and, in such cases, will make reasonable efforts to inform patients in advance.

**Cancellation by the Patient**

You may cancel a course of treatment for which you have booked an appointment and be fully refunded all fees for treatment not yet performed, provided you give the practice a minimum of 48 working hours prior notice.

If 48 working hours prior notice is not received, we reserve the right to withhold a proportionate amount of money, based upon the length of the appointment, to cover overheads.

This does not apply to NHS appointments, but we reserve the right to discontinue future care under the NHS.

We will refund the money to patients who wish to discontinue treatment at any time. A notice period of 14 days is required, upon which they will be eligible for a refund of any amount paid for treatment that they did not receive.

If a patient is receiving any treatment that involves laboratory work and initial work has been carried out; i.e. if the patient is having crowns/bridges or a denture made, and the work has already been started or completed by the laboratory, a proportion of the fee taken on the preparation appointment will be kept to cover the cost of the laboratory invoice and for the work done.

Please be aware that for NHS courses of treatments, the proportion of the fee is set by the NHS Business Services Authority, not the Practice.

Refunds will be processed within 14 days after receipt of your request in writing, either by e-mail or post.

If you have paid for services not yet provided that do not involve a laboratory fee, we will either credit your account or refund the transaction paid using the method by which the original payment was made. If the method was cash and you cannot collect the refund in person, it will be posted to you in the form of a cheque.

**Bad Debt Policy**

This practice maintains a strict payment policy: All payments for dental treatment should be made in full prior to the completion of treatment.

It is the discretion of the treating dentist as to whether the full payment is required before the start of treatment. Payments can be made by bank transfer, cash or by debit card. Credit card payments will also be accepted.

We currently do not take card payments over the phone. If the fees are not paid, the practice will inform the patient via phone or email there is money outstanding in their account and to refer to our payment policy.

If payment is not received within seven days, a second call, text message, letter, or email will be sent requesting immediate payment. If no contact or payment is received within the next seven days, a third text message will be sent warning of losing the right to be seen at the practice with immediate effect.

If payment is not made within 24 hours, we may use a debt recovery company to recover the outstanding debt.

**Zero Tolerance Policy**

Staff treating patients have the right to work free from any threat or fear of abuse, violence or forms of aggression.

The NHS nationally has agreed to a zero-tolerance policy.

Unacceptable behaviour which will not be tolerated within the dental practice includes:

- Actual or threatened physical violence on staff or other patients.
- Psychological abuse of staff
- Verbal abuse, which includes shouting or swearing
- Racial abuse
- Sexual harassment or abuse
- Threats against practice personnel which occur in the workplace
- Theft or damage of practice property
- Taking drugs or alcohol on the premises

If any patient is abusive or violent towards any staff member or other persons on the practice premises, the practice retains the right to remove the patient from its list. In extreme cases, the police may also be contacted.

All incidents must be reported to {Practice Manager} and recorded within the Significant Events Log. Any injuries will be recorded in the accident book.