

HIV clinic services

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HIV treatment centres often provide a range of services which patients can make use of. These services allow you to benefit from the expertise of a range of healthcare professionals, and are designed to complement the central role of your consultant in managing your care. A number of additional services, such as access to a psychologist or psychiatrist, are likely to be available by referral from your HIV doctor. Remember, all of these services are designed to support, not replace the specialist HIV care you receive from your HIV doctor, who should always be your first point of contact if you are feeling unwell, or have problems with your medication.

Some, or all, of the services mentioned in this factsheet are available at many UK HIV treatment centres, or they can be accessed elsewhere by patients. If they are not available at your clinic, do discuss with your doctor how you can obtain comparable services where appropriate.

Dietitians

A balanced diet is usually enough to meet the nutritional needs of people with HIV. However, sometimes, for example if you have lost a lot of weight after an illness or are finding it hard to eat because of drug side-effects, specialist dietary advice may be needed. Dietitians will look at your food intake with you and draw up a daily 'diet sheet' suggesting healthy foods which you should consider eating in order to meet your nutritional requirements. They can also recommend the use of replacement feeds if necessary.

Emergency walk-in doctors

If you have an urgent medical problem, which cannot wait until your next appointment with your regular clinic doctor, then some HIV clinics have an emergency walk-in service. This normally operates during clinic hours. Like hospital accident and emergency clinics, you will first see a triage nurse who will assess the seriousness of your condition, and waiting times to see a doctor can be quite long. Emergency doctors should not be used as a replacement for your HIV consultant or the routine services which your GP provides.

Foot clinics

Problems with feet and the lower legs are more common in people with HIV, and some clinics have specialist foot clinics which provide general chiropody. They can also provide advice on how to manage peripheral neuropathy, a side-effect of some older HIV drugs that are now rarely used.

Health advisers

Health advisers provide advice and support about sexual health, including safer sex, sexually transmitted infections, and other sexual problems such as sexual dysfunction. If you have been diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection, and you wish to inform your sexual partners about this, they can do this for you anonymously. This is called 'contact tracing'.

Pharmacists

As well as dispensing medications, pharmacists can provide specialist advice to assist you in managing your medication use – usually called adherence. This can take many forms, but may include drug interactions, dosing, food and drink requirements, medication storage, pill swallowing, alternative formulations, and advice on taking your medicines while travelling.

Research nurses

If you are taking part in an HIV clinical trial, a specialist research nurse will arrange your visits to the clinic and will be on hand to provide information about the trial.

Sexual health services

Many HIV treatment centres have a sexual health clinic attached where you can obtain free and confidential testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections. Many operate a walk-in service, where you can be seen without an appointment, but waiting times can be lengthy.

Social workers

If you go to a large HIV treatment centre, then there may well be a specialist HIV social worker, or Care Manager. Social workers can help you obtain support in relation to housing, money problems, claims for state benefits, children's services, immigration, other legal issues, and help you to remain living in your home. After an initial assessment, you may be referred to a social worker who can provide ongoing support in the area where you live.