

Your guide to private dentistry

Questions to ask



When you are choosing private treatment it pays to shop around and to ask the right questions.

Unlike National Health Service (NHS) care, where there are set prices for particular treatments, the fees for private treatment vary.

If you are considering private treatment, this leaflet has some basic advice on:

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Do I want NHS or private treatment?

Most private dentistry is carried out by dental practices that also provide NHS treatment.

Dentists are obliged to offer their NHS-registered patients treatment to meet all their clinical needs under the NHS.

Private dentistry offers some treatment not available on the NHS, such as cosmetic dentistry, and a wider choice of materials.

You may find that you are no longer registered for NHS treatment if:

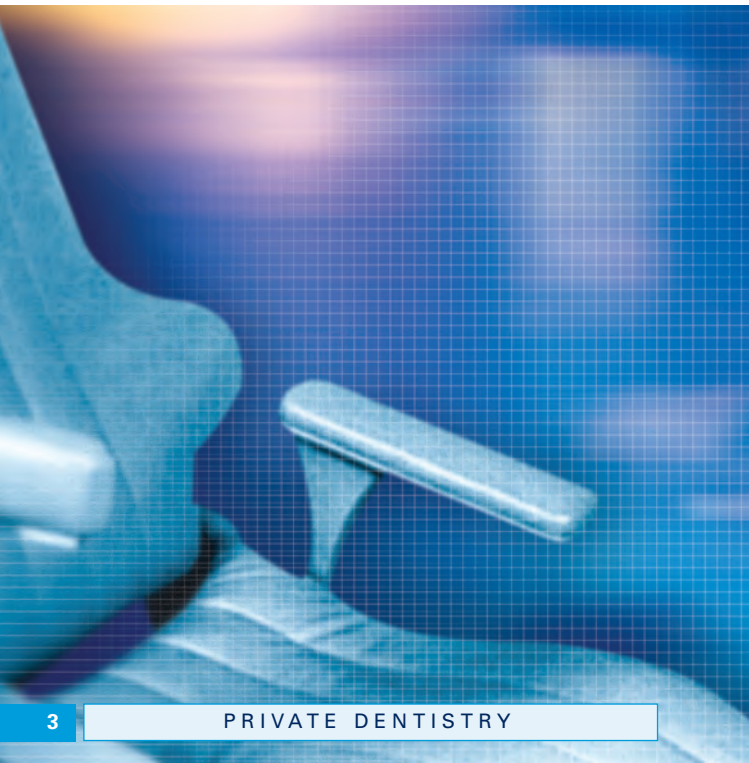
- you have not seen a dentist under the NHS in the last 15 months
- your dentist has de-registered you for some other reason (for example, to become a private-only practice).

If you want NHS treatment but are having problems finding a dentist, help is available. Contact one of the bodies listed on page 9 under 'Finding NHS treatment.'

Unless you are eligible for free NHS dental treatment or help with the cost, you will be asked to pay 80 per cent of the cost of your NHS treatment. Some people are exempt from NHS dental charges altogether. The leaflet HC11 *Are you entitled to help with health costs?* is available from main post offices.

When you agree to treatment make sure you are clear about whether your dentist is charging you for NHS or private treatment.

If you are registered for NHS treatment your dentist should give you a form to sign if you agree to have some or all of a course of treatment performed privately.



How do I choose a private dentist?

It is worth doing some research because services and prices vary.

Talk to the practices in your area and find out what they offer, ask friends or relatives for recommendations and look in your local telephone directory.

Be sure to discuss your particular needs and any special expertise you may need. For example:

- Will you need weekend appointments or out-of-hours emergency cover?
- Does your fear of dentists mean you need them to use relaxation techniques?
- Do you need treatment for young children?
- How does the practice keep up-to-date with the latest treatments and technology?
- What other services does the practice provide?

You should ask for a sample price list and discuss what these prices cover.

Find out in particular if the practice charges a registration fee (note, this is not the same as the initial examination fee).

Finally, find out if the practice participates in a quality assurance programme, such as a dental accreditation scheme, and how this benefits patients.

What are my treatment options?

There is no right level of treatment for any patient, so you will need information to help you make your decision.

Quite often, the same treatment can be given in different ways for very different prices. Ask your dentist what options are available and be sure to get a written and costed treatment plan.

Current professional guidance already encourages dentists to provide good up-front information. This should include:

- the initial consultation fee
- guide prices on treatments and services
- information on alternatives, particularly if the proposed treatment is extensive or costly.

Avoid making important decisions while you are in the dentist's chair. If expensive treatment is suggested, you may want time to go away and think about it, and possibly get a second opinion from another dentist (although you will be charged for this).

How should I pay?

There are three main ways of paying for private dental treatment:

- direct payments to the dentist on a fee-per-item basis. In most cases practices will ask you to settle your bill after each stage of treatment
- fixed regular monthly payments based on the expected level of treatment (these are called capitation schemes)
- dental insurance policies – these cover the cost of any private dental treatment up to a set limit. There are also policies that cover NHS treatment costs.

At the end of your treatment you are entitled to an itemised bill. This should give details of all the costs you have incurred, including items such as hygienist fees.



What happens if something goes wrong?

If you are unhappy with the service or treatment you have received first of all talk to your dentist. If you are still not satisfied write to your practice – which should have a formal complaints procedure.

If you feel that the dentist, dental hygienist or dental therapist has not been able to resolve your complaint satisfactorily, you should contact the Dental Complaints Service, which looks into complaints about private dental services provided by practices in the UK. Contact details can be found at the end of this leaflet.

If neither your practice nor the Dental Complaints Service can help, or resolve matters to your satisfaction, you may need to take action through the courts. For guidance contact Consumer Direct, an advice and information service for consumers in Great Britain, or Consumerline for consumers in Northern Ireland. Contact details can be found at the end of this leaflet.

Can I change my dentist?

You can change your dentist at any time – and should consider doing so if you aren't satisfied with the service or the way a complaint has been handled.

Under the Data Protection Act 1998 you have the right to get copies of personal records, including your dental records and x-rays. You'll need to make a written request to the dentist to get them and you may have to pay a fee. The Act limits how much you can be charged for this.

Checklist

Before choosing a private dentist or agreeing to any treatment, make sure you can answer the following questions:

Before choosing a dentist

Have I discussed my requirements in advance?

Does the practice provide the services I want?

Have I seen a sample price list?

Does the dentist charge a registration fee?
How much is it?

Have I compared services and prices with those of other practices?

Does the dentist have a formal complaints procedure?

Before agreeing to treatment

Are there alternatives to the treatment suggested?

Can I get the same treatment on the NHS?
If so do I still want to have the treatment carried out privately?

Have I received a written, costed treatment plan?

Will I get a fully itemised bill after treatment?

Have I discussed how my treatment will be paid for?

Useful contacts

Dental Complaints Service,

is an independent complaints service funded by the General Dental Council (GDC).

The Lansdowne Building

2 Lansdowne Road, Croydon CR9 2ER

Tel: 08456 120 540 (office hours)

Email: info@dentalcomplaints.org.uk

www.dentalcomplaints.org.uk

General Dental Council,

is the organisation which regulates dental professionals in the UK. All dentists, dental hygienists and dental therapists must be registered with the GDC to work in the UK.

37 Wimpole Street, London, W1G 8DQ.

Tel: 020 7887 3800

Email: information@gdc-uk.org

www.gdc-uk.org

British Dental Health Foundation,

is an independent charity which provides advice to members of the public on a wide range of oral health issues.

Tel: 0845 063 1188

(lo-call rate, 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday)

Email via www.dentalhelpline.org.uk

Consumer Direct,

is a telephone and online advice and information service for consumers in Great Britain, supported by the Office of Fair Trading in partnership with Trading Standards Services.

Tel: 08454 04 05 06

(Calls will cost no more than four pence a minute for BT customers, charges from other networks will vary, 8am-6.30pm Monday to Friday, 9am – 1pm Saturday)

www.consumerdirect.gov.uk

Consumerline,

is a consumer advice and information service, operating in partnership with Trading Standards Services and the General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland.

Tel: 0845 600 62 62 (lo-call rate, 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday)

www.consumerline.org

Finding NHS treatment

In England, contact your local Primary Care Trust or NHS Direct on 0845 4647 or www.nhs.uk

In Wales, contact your Local Health Board.

In Scotland, contact your local NHS Board or Primary Care NHS Trust.

In Northern Ireland, contact your local Health and Social Services Board.

Telephone numbers will be in your local telephone directory.

This leaflet is not aimed at people who urgently need treatment. You can also contact the above bodies if you urgently need NHS treatment.

Other (non-government) websites that may help you find a dentist in your area

British Dental Association

www.bda-findadentist.org.uk

Confederation of Dental Employers

www.codeUK.com

This information is available in other formats and languages on request. Please ring 0800 389 3158.

This leaflet is only a simple guide and should not be relied on as a complete statement of the law. To understand your rights and obligations fully, study the relevant law or consult a solicitor.

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