

Urgent referral to hospital The “two week rule”

What is the “two week rule”?

Your family doctor (GP) has guidelines about who to refer to a specialist if s/he thinks a person may have cancer. The guidelines also say how quickly this should be done.

Cancer can be difficult to spot because it can have the same symptoms as other, more common diseases. Your GP knows the most usual symptoms of cancer and will look out for patients who have these, or who don't get better after treatment for other conditions.

If your GP thinks that you need to be seen by a specialist quickly, s/he will refer you under the “two week rule” – this means that something will be done straight away. Your GP can tell you more about this.

What happens if my GP does think I may have cancer?

If your GP thinks you may have cancer, s/he will tell you what symptoms are causing concern and also any other conditions that may cause these.

Being referred to a specialist can be very worrying. Your GP is there to help and support you and give you as much information as you need.

Being referred to a specialist doesn't mean you have cancer; in fact most people who are referred don't have cancer

What should my GP tell me about my referral?

When you are referred your GP should be able to tell you:

- Which hospital you are being referred to
- How soon the appointment will be
- The type of specialist you will see
- What you can expect to happen at your appointment
- What tests you may have
- How long it is likely to be before you get the test results or a diagnosis
- Who can go with you to the appointment

You may be offered the details of someone at the practice who you can contact if you have any concerns while you are waiting for your appointment.

How quickly will I be seen by the specialist?

How quickly you are seen will depend on whether your GP is still uncertain what is wrong with you after:

- Asking you about your symptoms
- Considering how long you have had these symptoms
- Examining you
- Looking at the results of any tests you may have had

If you are referred urgently, the hospital may try to contact you by phone, rather than sending a letter, so make sure the GP practice has all your correct details. Please contact the hospital if you can't attend the appointment.

What tests will I have?

Occasionally your GP may have asked for blood tests or an x-ray before you are referred to the specialist. The tests you have at the hospital will depend on your symptoms and the type of cancer your GP thinks you may have.

You may be asked to attend for tests before your appointment with the specialist or on the day you attend the outpatient clinic. If so, you will receive information about what they involve and anything you need to do beforehand.

Waiting for your hospital appointment is a worrying time. You may find it helpful to contact one of the organisations listed below

What happens next?

What happens in the future will depend on the results of all your tests. If a diagnosis of cancer is confirmed, the specialist will discuss your possible treatment and care with you. Your friends or family can be included in this discussion, if you wish.

Remember that even though you have been referred to a specialist, it doesn't necessarily mean that you have cancer

Local and national information and support organisations

Cancer Resource Centre

Clapham Junction

Tel: 020 7924 3924 (Mon, Wed, Thurs; 10am-1pm & 2pm-5pm)

Website: www.cancer-resource-centre.org.uk

South East Cancer Help Centre

Purley, Surrey

Tel: 020 8668 0974 (Mon-Fri; 9.30am-5pm)

Website: www.sechc.org.uk

Cancerbackup

Freephone: 0808 800 1234

Website: www.cancerbackup.org.uk

Macmillan CancerLine

Freephone: 0808 808 2020

Website: www.macmillan.org.uk

NICE referral guidelines for urgent suspected cancer

For more information visit: www.nice.org.uk/CG027

and click on the document for patients, carers and the public.