

Annual health checks- Learning disabilities

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/learning-disabilities/annual-health-checks/>

August 2019

People with a learning disability often have poorer physical and mental health than other people. This does not need to be the case.

Annual health checks are for adults and young people aged 14 or over with a learning disability.

An annual health check helps you stay well by talking about your health and finding any problems early, so you get the right care.

You do not have to be ill to have a health check – in fact, most people have their annual health check when they're feeling well.

If you're worried about seeing a doctor, or there's anything they can do to make your visit better, let the doctor or nurse know. They'll help make sure it goes well for you.

Watch this film about [annual health checks for people with a learning disability](#)

Who's eligible?

Anyone aged 14 or over who's on their GP's learning disability register can have a free annual health check once a year.

You can ask to go on this register if you think you have a learning disability.

The learning disability register is different from the register of social care needs managed by local councils.

Check with your GP practice if you or the person you care for is on the register.

How will it help?

You'll get to know your GP better, which will help if you ever do get ill.

Most health problems are simple to treat once you know about them.

Your GP can help stop you getting a serious health condition. This is better than waiting until you're ill.

You can ask your GP questions about your health, how you're feeling, your care or any medicines you take.

Your GP can give you information you need in a way that will help you.

How do you get an appointment?

Adults and young people aged 14 or over with a learning disability who are on the GP practice learning disability register should be invited by their GP practice to come for an annual health check.

What if my GP doesn't offer the annual health check?

Most GP surgeries offer annual health checks to people with a learning disability. However, GP surgeries don't have to offer this service.

If your GP surgery hasn't offered you an annual health check, you can ask them if they could provide one. If they say no, ask your local community learning disability team for advice. They should be able to help you access an annual health check. You can find their details here:

<https://www.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/our-services/adult-healthcare/learning-disabilities-ctpld/>

What happens during the annual health check?

During the health check, the GP or practice nurse will:

- do a physical check-up, including weight, heart rate, blood pressure and taking blood and urine samples
- talk to you about staying well and if you need any help with this
- ask about things that are more common if you have a learning disability, such as [epilepsy](#), [constipation](#) or [problems with swallowing](#)
- talk to you about your medicines
- if you have a health problem such as [asthma](#) or [diabetes](#), the GP or nurse will check how it's going
- check to see if you have any other health appointments, such as [physiotherapy](#) or speech therapy
- ask if family and/or carers are getting the support they need
- help make sure that things go well when children move to adult services at the age of 18

If your learning disability has a specific cause, the GP or practice nurse will often carry out additional tests if there are any other health risks.

For people with [Down's syndrome](#), for example, they may do a test to see if the thyroid gland is working properly.

You'll be asked for your [consent](#) (permission) to share information with other services that provide your care. This will help you get the right support if you go to a hospital, for example.

The GP or practice nurse will also give you health information, such as advice on [healthy eating](#), [exercise](#), [contraception](#) or [stopping smoking](#).

Health Check Action Plans

When the Health Check is complete your GP will offer you a 'Health Check Action Plan'. If they don't offer one you can ask for one.

A health check action plan should include:

1. goals and plans for future care
2. who is responsible for co-ordination of care and how this is communicated to other professionals and services involved

3. timing of follow-up and how to access urgent care

The actions in the health check action plan might be for the GP, other clinicians, the individual or their carers/supporters.

All actions should be agreed with the person and a copy of the health check action plan should be provided to them.

Findings from an Annual Health Check and details of the Health Check Action Plan should feed into people's care plans and, for patients aged under 18, their Education, Health and Care Plan if they have one.

Making reasonable adjustments for you

A reasonable adjustment is when somebody changes how they do things to make it better for you.

People with a learning disability have a legal right for reasonable adjustments to be made so they can get the same benefits from healthcare services as everyone else.

Ask your GP if you need any reasonable adjustments, such as:

- using pictures, large print or simpler words to say what's happening
- booking longer appointments
- putting an appointment at the beginning or end of the day, if you find it hard to be in a busy waiting room

The reasonable adjustments you need should be written down in a health profile or health action plan that the GP or nurse can use.

Do you have to have an annual health check?

No. All parts of the health check are voluntary.

Anyone who's having the health check, or their carer, can ask the GP or practice nurse for more information about the process.

The person can then give their [consent](#) before any tests or procedures are carried out.

Is the annual health check the same as the NHS Health Check?

No. The NHS Health Check programme is for all adults aged 40 to 74.

It assesses their risk of [heart disease](#), [stroke](#), [kidney disease](#), [diabetes](#) and [dementia](#) every 5 years

How many people have the annual health check?

In 2016-17, about 53% of people with a learning disability who are on their GP's learning disability register had a health check. This means just under half of people who are on the register did not have a health check.

However, not everyone with a learning disability is on their GP register, so even more people who could benefit from the free annual health check are missing out.