

A Family Carer's Guide to Annual health checks for people with Learning disabilities

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

What is an Annual Health Check?

Annual health checks are for adults and young people with a learning disability aged 14 or over. An annual health check helps people stay well by talking about their health and finding any problems early, so they get the right care.

No one has to have an annual health check unless they want one, but it is a good idea for those who want to be as healthy as they can. They can also give consent to any tests or procedures before they are carried out.

If your cared for person is worried about seeing a doctor, let the doctor or nurse know. They will help to make sure the experience is as relaxed and easy as possible.

Anyone aged 14 or over, who's on their GP's Learning Disability register, will get an invite once a year for a free annual health check. Check with your GP practice if the person you care for is on the register.

As a Carer you can ask for your cared for person to go on this register if you think they aren't already registered. The GP learning disability register is different from the register of social care needs managed by local councils.

How will it help?

If your cared for person ever does get ill, it means that your GP will know them really well, which will help with treatment. The GP can help to stop them getting a serious health condition. This is better than waiting until someone gets ill. They can also ask their GP questions about their health, and talk about how they're feeling, or any medicines they take.

The GP can give them information they need in a way that will help them.

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

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, you can ask a Reading Mencap Family Adviser for help on Tel: 0118 9662518

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 about staying well and if help is needed with this.
- ask about things that are more common if someone has a learning disability, such as epilepsy, constipation, or problems with swallowing
- talk about the person's medicines

- if there is a health problem such as asthma or diabetes, the GP or nurse will check how it's going
- check to see if there are 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 cared for person's 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.

The person will be asked for their consent (permission) to share information with other services that provide their care. This helps to get the right support if someone goes to a hospital, for example.

The GP or practice nurse will also provide health information, such as advice on healthy eating, exercise, contraception or stopping smoking.

Health Check Action Plans

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

A health check action plan should include:

- Goals and plans for future care
- Who is responsible for co-ordination of care and how this is communicated to other professionals and services involved.
- 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 with a learning disability 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 the patient's care plans and, for those 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 someone.

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 your cared for person needs 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 the person finds it hard to be in a busy waiting room

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