CHEW ON THIS

Before Your *GP Appointment*

What to write down, what to ask, and what should never wait



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A free guide from Chew On This

WHY I MADE THIS

One Minute and a Prescription

For years I lived with bloating, stomach spasms and brain fog so thick I could barely think. When it came to a head, the doctor listened to my stomach for a minute, said IBS, and prescribed antispasmodics.

No questions about my diet. I sat in my car with the prescription in my hand, thinking: surely food is the first place to start, not the last resort.

I'm a nurse, and I still didn't know what to ask. Your GP is on your side, and is often working with a short slot and a full waiting room. I made this so those minutes count.

1. **Fill in the three sections in the week before, at home**
2. **Take it with you, printed or on your phone**
3. **Write down what you're told before you leave the room**

> This guide is for education only. It isn't a diagnosis and it doesn't replace your own doctor. **Outside the UK?** Everything here works for any doctor's appointment. Swap GP, NHS 111 and 999 for your local services.

READ THIS FIRST

Symptoms That Can't Wait

CALL 999 OR GO TO A&E NOW

- Bleeding from your bottom that won't stop, or a lot of blood, like red toilet water or large clots
- Vomiting blood, or sick that looks like coffee grounds
- Sudden, severe tummy pain
- A swollen, painful tummy when you can't poo or pass wind, especially if you're being sick

GET HELP TODAY: NHS 111 OR AN URGENT GP APPOINTMENT

- Black, sticky, tar like poo, or dark red blood in your poo. **Call 999 if you also feel faint or very unwell.**
- Bloody diarrhoea
- You can't keep fluids down

This page isn't here to frighten you. If something feels wrong but isn't listed, get it checked anyway.

READ THIS TOO

Symptoms to Book an Appointment For

BOOK A GP APPOINTMENT

- **Straight away:** blood in your poo or on the toilet paper
- **If it lasts 3 weeks or more:** a change in your poo that isn't normal for you, often needing to go even after you just have, tummy pain or bloating that keeps coming back, weight loss without trying, or tiredness for no reason
- A lump in your tummy

Always mention it if bowel cancer, coeliac disease, Crohn's or colitis runs in your family.

Does any of this run in your family? Tick it now, so it gets said in the room.

- ☐ Bowel cancer
- ☐ Coeliac disease
- ☐ Crohn's or colitis
- ☐ Not that I know of

Anything on these two pages I need to mention

BEFORE YOU GO IN

Making a Short Appointment Count

Six habits that get more out of a short slot. None of them takes any nerve.

1. **Say the thing that worries you most first**

   If it comes out as you're leaving, with your hand on the door, it gets the least time.

2. **One main problem per appointment**

   Got several? Mention it when you book. Some surgeries can offer a longer slot.

3. **Read from your notes**

   Nobody minds, and nerves can't wipe what you wrote.

4. **Describe, don't diagnose**

   "Loose poo three times a day for five weeks" gets further than "I think it's IBS".

5. **Bring someone if it helps**

   A second pair of ears is useful when you're anxious or in pain.

6. **Never leave without a plan**

   Even if the plan is to wait and see, you should know how long for.

FILL THIS IN · 1 OF 3

Your Symptom Story

What is the main symptom, and when did it start?

How often does it happen?

- ☐ Every day
- ☐ Most days
- ☐ Weekly
- ☐ On and off

What does it feel like?

Cramping, burning, pressure, urgent, heavy. Your own words are best.

What makes it better or worse?

Certain foods, stress, time of day, your period, exercise.

Tick any that apply

- ☐ Wakes me at night
- ☐ Worse after eating
- ☐ Getting worse
- ☐ Weight change

How much is it affecting your life? 0 is barely, 10 is every day, all day. My score is _____ out of 10.

FILL THIS IN · 2 OF 3

Your Poo, Written Down

TYPE	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	READS AS
1	Separate hard lumps, hard to pass	Constipated
2	Lumpy, sausage shaped	Constipated
3	Sausage shaped, cracks on the surface	Normal
4	Smooth and soft, like a sausage	Normal
5	Soft blobs with clear edges, easy to pass	Loose side
6	Mushy, fluffy pieces, ragged edges	Loose
7	Watery, no solid pieces	Diarrhoea

DAY	TIMES	TYPE	BLOOD	URGENT
Day 1				
Day 2				
Day 3				
Day 4				
Day 5				
Day 6				
Day 7				

Awkward to talk about, and one of the most useful things you can bring. Clinicians use this seven type scale. Not sure of the type? Write what you saw.

FILL THIS IN · 3 OF 3

Everything Else They'll Ask

Medicines and supplements you take

Include painkillers, iron tablets, antacids and anything bought over the counter.

What you've already tried

Cutting foods out, probiotics, medicines. What helped, and what didn't?

Anything else going on

Stress, shift work, poor sleep, recent travel, a course of antibiotics.

IN THE ROOM

Questions You're Allowed to Ask

Tick the two or three that fit you before you go in.

- ☐ **Could this be coeliac disease, and have I been tested?**
  A blood test. Eat gluten in more than one meal a day for at least 6 weeks first, or it can read falsely normal.
- ☐ **Would any blood tests help?**
  Checking for anaemia and inflammation is a normal part of looking into gut symptoms.
- ☐ **Would a stool test for inflammation be useful?**
  A calprotectin test helps tell bowel inflammation apart from IBS.
- ☐ **Could any of my medicines be causing this?**
  Iron tablets, some painkillers and some antidepressants can all affect your gut.
- ☐ **What else could this be?**
  A calm way to find out what's been ruled out, and what hasn't.
- ☐ **Could I be referred to a dietitian?**
  Diets like low FODMAP work best with a dietitian's support.
- ☐ **What should make me come back sooner?**
  The name for this is safety netting, and it's fair to ask for it.
- ☐ **What's the plan if this doesn't help?**
  So you know the next step before you need it.

WHAT TO SAY

Open With One Sentence

Fill in the gaps and say it before anything else. In one breath your GP has what it is, how long it's been going on, how much it's costing you, and what you came for.

YOUR OPENING LINE

"I've had _____ for _____, it's affecting _____, and I'd like to understand what's causing it."

For example: "I've had bloating and loose poo for six weeks, it's affecting my sleep and my work, and I'd like to understand what's causing it."

If you feel brushed off

- "I'd feel more reassured if we could rule out _____."
- "Can you help me understand why you don't think it's _____?"
- "Could you note in my record that I raised this today?"
- "If it isn't better in _____ weeks, what should I do?"
- "Is there someone else I could see about this?"

> You're not picking a fight by saying any of these. They get your concern heard, and written down.

BEFORE YOU LEAVE

What I Was Told

What they think is going on

Tests ordered, and how I get the results

Medicines or changes suggested

Come back sooner if

Ask for this one if they don't tell you.

Next appointment, or when to follow up

Questions I didn't get to ask

Where this comes from: the warning signs on pages 3 and 4 and the tests on page 9 follow NHS and NICE guidance, put into plain words.

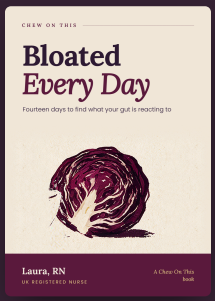
YOU'RE READY

You Deserve the Whole Conversation

Walking in with this filled in doesn't make you a difficult patient. It makes you a prepared one, and prepared appointments are the ones that go somewhere.

BEFORE YOU GO

Book the appointment before you close this guide. If you've been waiting for it to feel less awkward, I'll save you the wait: it doesn't.



THE NEXT BOOK

Bloated Every Day

For afterwards, and only if you want it. Once you've been seen, this is the next step if you want to find your own pattern: fourteen days to find what your gut is reacting to.

See the book ›

Look after yourself,

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