

Patient information

Ear, Nose and Throat outpatients department

Surgery and critical care division

Introduction

We hope this guide will answer your questions about the Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) outpatients department at The Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust. Please contact the team if you require further information via the details at the end of this leaflet.

What is the ENT outpatients department?

Our ENT service is responsible for investigating, diagnosing and treating disorders and defects of the ears, nose and throat, for both children and adults.

The team consists of consultant surgeons, specialty doctors, specialist registered nurses, specialist audiologists and voice therapists, who work together to provide a comprehensive range of services for all ENT disorders and defects.

Why have I been referred?

Your GP has referred you to the service to receive a full examination of your ears, nose or throat, in order to identify the cause of your symptoms. Please carefully read through the information below before your examination.

What to expect during your examination

Ear examination

During your ear examination, the ENT specialist may look around and in your ear, using a small hand-held instrument called an auriscope or otoscope. This allows the specialist to get a clearer view of your ear canal and eardrum.

You may also require microsuction on your ear, using a instrument that feels similar to a small vacuum cleaner, which enables the specialist to clean out your ear canal.

In some cases, people are referred for a hearing test following their examination. Hearing tests are held at the audiology department at St Margaret's Hospital in Epping as well as in ENT Outpatients in Harlow and Bishops Stortford.

The above examinations will help us to diagnose and treat your condition.

Nose examination

During your nose examination, the ENT specialist may look inside your nose using a nasal speculum, which is a small instrument that holds your nostrils open to allow a clearer view.

Sometimes, a flexible telescope is inserted into the nose to get a better look inside. This is not normally painful and if you find it uncomfortable, a local anaesthetic spray can be used.

Your nose may require cauterisation (a small chemical burn) for conditions such as regular nosebleeds, in order to stop the bleeding. Your nose will be numbed with a local anaesthetic before this happens.

The above examinations and procedures will help us to diagnose and treat your condition.

Throat examination

During your throat examination, the ENT specialist may look inside your throat using a nasendoscope, which is a narrow flexible tube that has a camera inside, to give a clear view of your throat and voice box.

The nasendoscope is passed through your nose, which may have been numbed with a local anaesthetic first in order to reduce any discomfort.

The above examinations and procedures will help us to diagnose and treat your condition.

Preparing for your examination

Nothing needs to be changed in respect of your medication or restricted diet before your appointment, unless you have been specifically advised otherwise.

The day of your examination

Getting to us

Once you have made your appointment for your examination with our ENT team, you will receive an appointment confirmation letter or telephone call. This will include the location of your appointment.

Appointments are held either at The Princess Alexandra Hospital (Hamstel Road, Harlow, Essex, CM20 1QX) in Bevan Ward, St Margaret's Hospital (The Plain, Epping, Essex, CM16 6TN), and Herts and Essex Hospital (Herts and Essex Hospital, Haymeads Lane, Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire, CM23 5JH).

When should I arrive?

Once you have made your appointment for your examination with our ENT team, you will receive an appointment confirmation letter or telephone call. Please make a note of your appointment date and time.

Please ensure that you leave plenty of time to arrive at the hospital, park your vehicle and find the department.

If you think that you are likely to require a hearing test, please arrive a little earlier than your allocated time if possible (15 earlier should be adequate). If you can't attend earlier the test will still take place if required.

Can I bring somebody with me?

We are unable to accommodate any other people in the examination room due to health and safety regulations. However, if you would like to be chaperoned throughout, please let a member of our team know.

You are able to bring an adult with you, who will be able to sit in our waiting area. We suggest that you do not bring children with you to your appointment, unless they are accompanied by another adult, as we are unable to look after them throughout your examination.

How long will the examination take?

For standard ENT appointments, they typically last 20 – 30 minutes. Appointments requiring a hearing assessment or small procedures might take longer.

After the examination

What can I expect after the examination?

If you require a local anaesthetic spray to have endoscopy you should avoid eating or drinking anything other than water for at least one hour after the examination or until the sensation in your throat returns to normal.

Can I eat and drink normally afterwards?

You can eat and drink as normal as soon as the sensation in your throat has returned to normal. You should be able to continue drinking plain water.

Can I drive after the examination?

If you are coming in due to dizziness, some of the tests may make you temporarily dizzy. It is advisable to bring someone with you who may need to drive if this is the case.

How and when will I receive my results?

We try our utmost to inform you of your results as soon as we can. Sometimes though this will take many months, especially if your results are not worrying. We are working on creating new channels to be able to review results quicker and to keep you informed sooner.

Improving your ENT health

There are many ways in which you can improve the health of your ears, nose and throat. Please carefully read through the guidance below:

Ear wax management

Most ears have the ability to clean themselves, however some people will need assistance to get rid of excess wax. Follow the guidance below for a few weeks or continuously until your symptoms improve. Some people who have long standing problems with wax will need to follow this regime all the time.

- Avoid usage of cotton buds to clean your ears
- Apply two to three drops of olive oil in each ear every night for seven days:
 - Tilt your head away from the ear that you are treating, squeeze the drops in and tug your ear gently backwards
 - Wait for five seconds and repeat on the opposite ear
 - Expect some of the oil to run out of your ear, there is no need to plug your ear
 - After seven days, repeat the steps above but use sodium bicarbonate drops instead of olive oil drops, for another seven days
 - Keep switching between olive oil drops and sodium bicarbonate drops until the issue improves
- You can purchase olive oil and sodium bicarbonate drops from any chemist's over the counter in ready made preparations.
- Some people may need to have their ears cleaned by a healthcare professional at our ENT clinic a few times a year. In some cases, people may have their ears cleaned by their GP or by using a home kit.

Protecting your ears

Avoid exposing your ears to loud noises, especially for long periods of time. Be mindful when you visit noisy places, such as clubs or music concerts. Take breaks if you wear ear phones for long periods of time. Ensure that you don't listen to music very loudly. Once loud noise damages your ears, this is irreversible.

Managing nosebleeds

- Sit with your head upright
- Pinch the soft part of your nose with a tissue. Use a strong grip with many fingers to do this.
- Place an ice-cube in your mouth
- Time the bleed. If bleeding has not stopped after 15-20 minutes, you should attend your local emergency department

Advice to maintain a healthy throat

- Avoid smoking
- Avoid drinking excess alcohol
- Drink as much water as you can, little and often is better
- Use steam inhalation once or twice a day
- Add honey to your hot drinks
- Avoid shouting or whispering
- If singing is your hobby, consider some form of vocal training to avoid straining your throat
- If you use your voice professionally, ensure that you maintain an upright posture, with an open chest, to enhance deep breathing
- Avoid foods that worsen acid reflux
- Treat any indigestion or heartburn with over the counter medication/supplements

Keep a look out for throat cancer symptoms, including:

- Difficulty in swallowing food (**not** tablets or your own saliva)
- Persistent sharp ear pain with a sore throat
- Losing weight or your appetite without a good reason
- Significant voice hoarseness
- New lumps in your neck or mouth that stay for more than three weeks

If you have any concerns, please contact your GP surgery for advice.

Quitting smoking support

Smoking is directly linked to cancers of the mouth, throat and lungs. It is so important that you quit smoking as soon as possible.

Smoking is also directly linked to causing ear, nose and throat problems for young children around you. Even if you smoke outside the house, young children can still inhale your smoke as it lingers on your clothes for hours.

For support to quit smoking, please visit www.nhs.uk and search 'quit smoking'.

Reducing your alcohol intake

Drinking alcohol affects your throat, voice and ability to swallow. It also increases the chance of developing cancer in those areas.

Try to limit the amount of alcohol you drink to fewer than 14 units a week. A unit is a small glass of wine.

Alcohol can also be involved in causing you certain types of vertigo and should be therefore be completely avoided in such cases.

Contacting the team

If you have any further questions, please contact the appointments booking team on:

Telephone: 01279 827391

Office hours: 8am-5pm, Monday-Friday or

The ENT secretary team on:

Telephone: 01279 827414/16

Office hours: 8am-5pm, Monday-Friday

Your feedback matters

If you would like to give feedback on your care, please contact our patient experience team on paht.pals@nhs.net or **01279 827211**.

Please email the communications team at paht.communications@nhs.net if you would like this leaflet in another language or format.