Getting help isn’t easy, especially when it feels like everything is going wrong, the things bothering you are hard to talk about and you don’t have the information you need to make good decisions. It can feel pretty isolating.

The good news is that GPs/doctors are here to help - so you don’t have to work out all of life’s problems on your own!

What is a GP?

- GPs (General Practitioners) are also called family or local doctors and look after the physical and mental/emotional health of the whole person.

- GPs are used to talking about things that young people might find embarrassing or difficult to discuss. They can offer help and advice, treat people when they are sick and also try to encourage healthy habits. If your GP can’t help with your problem, they can refer you to someone that can.

How do I find a GP I am comfortable talking to?

- You need to find a GP that you trust and feel comfortable to talk honestly with about your feelings, as well as to discuss what is happening with your body and life in general. If you don’t feel like you can talk about certain things with your family GP, its pays to shop around.

- Phone up for and ask for an appointment or call in to the practice to make one. To assist scheduling an appropriate appointment, it would be helpful to tell reception staff if your problems are urgent, if you are a new patient, if you have more than one issue to discuss, or if you have special needs or need an interpreter.

- If you just arrive at the practice without an appointment, you may need to wait longer or could be asked to come back another day if your issue isn’t considered urgent.

- Not everyone has a positive experience when seeing a GP. If you go to a GP that you don’t like, find another one that you do. You could ask others for recommendations or do some research yourself. If you are not happy with the way you have been treated or feel that your health issue or information has not been dealt with appropriately, you have the right to complain. You can complain to the practice you visited and the matter should be considered and resolved in a timely way. If you are unhappy with the way your complaint was handled by the practice, you can make a formal complaint to the: Health Services Commissioner, Toll Free: 1800 136 066, [http://www.health.vic.gov.au/hsc](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/hsc)
How do general practice/doctor’s surgery/clinic work?

- General practices are also called doctors surgeries and clinics and are usually private medical businesses that are staffed by GPs, reception staff and often practice nurses.

- When you see the GP, the visit will likely run between 10-15 minutes (or perhaps longer for the first visit). If you require longer or have lots of problems ask for a longer appointment when you book in to see the GP.

What are Practice Nurses?

- General practice nurses are qualified and registered health professionals in the same way as other nurses working in hospitals. Practice nurses choose to work in the community as part of a health care team with GPs.

- Nurses can access and write in your medical records and are able to provide advice on most health issues, including contraception and lifestyle issues, as well as conduct medical procedures and tests on behalf of the GP, such as pregnancy tests, health checks and immunisations. Nurses cannot prescribe medications.

How private is my health information?

- GPs, along with all staff that work in a GP clinic, are legally bound to keep your health information private/confidential. This means that they can’t tell anybody that you have attended the practice and GPs and nurses who have access to your health records cannot talk about anything in your medical file outside the practice without your permission.

- There are some important exceptions to this. In these situations, a GP or nurse must talk to other people in your life who can protect you. The GP/nurse will make every effort to discuss this with you first so you can contact the safe people together.

Important exceptions to confidentiality rules:

- When your life is at risk (eg. from self-harm)
- When somebody else’s life is at risk (eg. from homicide)
- When you are being physically or sexually abused
- When you are unable to understand the treatments being offered by your doctor
- When a court of law subpoena’s information if you are involved in a court case.
How do payments work in general practice?

- The Government pays for most of your medical appointment through Medicare. Every Australian family is issued a Medicare card with a unique Medicare number. If you don't have your Medicare card with you and you want to see a GP, ask the reception staff to ring the Medicare Hotline to find out your Medicare number.

- Different GPs and practices have different approaches to billing. Reception staff will be able to tell you about their practice’s billing policy.

  - Some practices bulk-bill meaning you don’t have to pay as Medicare covers the cost of your appointment. You may be able to be bulk-billed if you have a Health Care card, so always take it with you.

  - Some practices privately bill so you need to pay for the appointment and then take your receipt to a Medicare office to claim some of that payment back from Medicare.

  - Other practices charge a “gap” payment so you pay a lesser amount on the day but don’t receive any payment back from Medicare.

How do I get my own Medicare card?

- If you are 15 years of age or older, you are eligible for your own Medicare card. You will need two forms of identification (such as a birth certificate or student card etc). If you apply at a Medicare Office they will give you a Medicare number over the counter and then send you the card. You can also apply to Medicare by mail but it could take a few weeks and the new card will be sent to the address you nominate. Application forms can be downloaded from the Medicare website http://www.medicare.gov.au

- If you want to apply for your new card, it is a good idea to discuss this decision with your parents beforehand, as they will automatically be sent a new copy of their family Medicare card with your name removed when you receive your card. You can also choose to just stay on your parent’s Medicare card and just get your own copy with their permission.

What should I expect when I arrive at my appointment?

On arrival

- When you arrive at the practice, you will need to go to the reception counter to let the staff know you’re there. If you haven’t been to the practice before you may be asked to fill in a new patient’s contacts form.
A new approach adopted by many practices now is to ask young people to fill in a health risk survey, which helps GPs and nurses in the clinic find out more about how your lifestyle affects your health. This information is collected to assist with understanding your physical and mental health and in providing you with the most appropriate advice, options and treatment.

Be prepared to wait for a while to see the GP. Generally, there is more patient demand than doctors available, meaning delays on some occasions. Ask the receptionist about how long you will need to wait when you arrive. Take a magazine, mp3 player or book with you to pass the time. Let the receptionist know if you need to step outside whilst you wait. Make sure you listen out for your name to be called!

During your appointment

- The GP or nurse may need to ask you personal or sensitive questions about your health and lifestyle. You may be asked about:
  - whether you have any illnesses, operations, tests, medications and appointments with specialists in the past.
  - whether you have any allergies or any illnesses within your family.
  - specific problems that you have, including; when did the problem start, how did it start, what impact is this having of you, what makes your problem better or worse.
  - different aspects of your lifestyle that could be impacting on your physical and mental health, such as; life at home, smoking, drugs & alcohol, eating & exercise habits, relationships, your sexuality and sexual practices and driving safety.

- You may need to be physically examined by your GP or nurse, have some further tests, or be referred to another specialist doctor or health professional like a physiotherapist or counsellor.

- Your GP or nurse may also offer you health advice and counseling to assist you with changing the things in your lifestyle that are impacting on your health.

After your appointment

- You will need to go back to the reception desk in order to sign your Medicare form, pay any fees and book another appointment if required.

What questions should I be asking?

- When you see your GP or nurse it is really important that you understand what has been said. If you don’t understand, ask them to explain things again in simpler language, in a different way or maybe through using examples. You could also repeat what you think has been discussed and ask your doctor or nurse whether you have understood things correctly.

- You can also ask about any associated costs, practical information about how to get to appointments and what other options are available. If you don’t think you can follow their suggestions, let your GP or nurse know so you can discuss any possible alternatives.
Getting help for yourself, and/or helping a mate seek help, may be the one of the toughest things you'll ever do. Finding the right GP for you can also take time and patience.

So in summary...

- Find a GP you feel comfortable with.
- Phone up for an appointment and ask about payments - If your issue is urgent, tell reception staff.
- Bring your Medicare number or card - if you don’t have this information speak to reception staff.
- Ring if you can’t make your appointment or are running really late.
- Let the reception staff know when you have arrived.
- Take a magazine, music or something to do if you have to wait.
- Bring along a supportive adult or friend if you want.
- Be honest with your GP or nurse during your appointment, be prepared to answer questions and don’t be afraid to ask questions.
- Clarify and raise any concerns you have about confidentiality and treatment options.
- Come back for follow-up appointments!
Key health messages for young people

Have supportive people in your life
- Support networks can be important for your emotional health. You can talk to your GP or nurse about the support networks you have in your life.

Feel safe at school or work
- Australian research shows that at least half of young people at school have experienced some kind of bullying. We also know that feeling good about your school, uni or workplace is important for your emotional wellbeing. You can talk to your GP or nurse about how you feel about your study or work place?

Eat a balanced diet
- Eating a balanced diet and getting enough exercise can be difficult to fit into your day and some people eat or exercise for emotional reasons. Talking with your GP or nurse about how to keep a sensible balance may be helpful.

Smoking, excessive drinking and taking drugs affect your health
- Some Australian young people drink alcohol, or smoke, and some may take other drugs. These affect health even if you don't feel as if they do. There are ways to reduce harm from using these substances - your GP or nurse can discuss these with you.

Practice safe sex
- About 25% of young people in Year 10 have had sex and about 50% by age 18. About 10% of young people would classify themselves as same sex attracted. Sexually transmitted infections are most common in the youth age group and can be prevented by using condoms which can also prevent unplanned pregnancies. Your GP or nurse can talk with you about queries, or concerns, you have about sex or relationships.

Look after your mental health as well as your physical health
- About 1 in 5 Australian young people will experience a mental or emotional health problem. Mental health issues can be hard to talk about, but evidence shows that getting help early from a health professional can shorten the problem and get you back on track. Help does not necessarily mean taking medicine. Counselling with a trained person and having supportive people in your life are important.

Keep yourself safe from violence, accidents and injury
- Every person has a right to be safe wherever they are. If other people threaten your safety you have a right to seek help. There may be things you can do to protect your own safety, e.g. wearing a seat belt when in a car or seeking a refuge if you are exposed to violence.

- Accidents and injuries—especially road traffic accidents—currently account for 75% of the deaths in the 12 to 24 year age group. To ensure safety in vehicles it’s important to always wear a seatbelt, not to speed, not to talk on a mobile phone, not be under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol and not to get into a car with a driver who is.
Where to go for help?

The Internet, phone help lines, health professionals, trusted friends and family members can all be good sources of help when you need it.

**The Kids Helpline:** 24 hour, free call telephone counselling for children and young people under 18 years. Phone: 1800 55 1800. Website: http://www.kidshelp.com.au

**Young People's Health Service:** a free drop-in medical and counselling service for disadvantaged young people aged 12-22 years, located at Frontyard, 19 King Street, Melbourne. Open Monday – Friday, 12.00 – 5.00pm. Phone: 9611 2409

**The Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre:** hosts an on-line counselling service for people seeking help about their own drug use or the drug use of a family member, relative or friend. A “live” professional counsellor is available 24-hours a day, 7-day a week. Website: https://www.counsellingonline.org.au. Telephone support is also available by phoning 1800 888 236

**Melbourne Sexual Health Centre (MSHC):** provides a range of direct client services, including testing, counselling and clinical management of STIs including HIV/AIDS. Phone: 1800 032 017. Website: http://www.mshc.org.au

**The Action Centre for Young People:** a sexual health centre for young people up to 25 years, located at Level 1, 94 Elizabeth Street, Melbourne, provides services by doctors, nurses and counsellors. Phone: 9654 4766 or for country free call Ph. 1800 013 952. Some costs may apply. Website: http://www.sexlife.net.au

**Lifeline:** a 24 hour, free call telephone counselling for all ages. Phone: 13 1114. Website: http://www.lifeline.org.au

**The Reachout website:** for young people going through ‘tough times’. Website: http://www.reachout.com.au

**The national domestic violence phone helpline for victims and perpetrators of violence:** Phone: 1800 200 526

**CASA: Victorian Centres Against Sexual Assault:** Phone: 1800 806 292 (24 hours). Website: http://www.casa.org.au/

**beyondblue:** information about depression and anxiety. Website: http://www.youthbeyondblue.com

Stay Safe

If you believe you are in danger, face a life threatening situation or there is any chance that you may be going to harm yourself in any way - seek help immediately!

If you are feeling suicidal or unsafe you need to immediately get help to keep safe. Suicidal thoughts are a common symptom of major depression and other mental health issues. You need to get treatment in order to get well. It doesn't happen overnight but it does happen! If you are in immediate danger you need to call LIFELINE 13 11 14 or another emergency counselling service listed above, or your doctor, or get yourself to hospital accident & emergency (open 24hrs) as soon as you can. It is a good idea to have someone with you if you can. Call a friend, family member or neighbour you trust to be with you and help you get to the professional help and support you are needing.

If you, or someone you are with, are in danger or face a life threatening or emergency situation, call 000 for assistance. If you are unable to have someone be with you, and need to get to a hospital, be careful about driving yourself and call an ambulance or get a taxi.

Police/Fire/Ambulance Ph:000  Opening Hours: 24 Hours