



Patient Information

Referral for Community Musculoskeletal (MSK) therapy with Connect Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

You have been referred to Connect Health for your current problems. This guide explains how your care will be provided and gives you some useful information to maximise the benefit of your support from Connect.

What does musculoskeletal (MSK) therapy mean?

Musculoskeletal (MSK) applies to bones, muscles, ligaments, tendons and joints. Musculoskeletal medicine is about treating problems such as pain, swelling or stiffness affecting your muscles, joints or bones such as your back, knees, hips, feet or hands.

Who is Connect?

Connect is an organisation that offers diagnosis and treatment for musculoskeletal conditions for patients in the community. Connect provides these services for the NHS in many areas around the country. Connect has a wide range of specialists including physiotherapists, hand therapists, pain specialists, podiatrists, GPs and consultants.

What specific problems do Connect treat?

Connect can treat any condition (apart from problems that need emergency care e.g fractures) that are related to the muscles, joints, tendons and bones such as arthritis, tendonitis, back pain and neck pain etc. They also specialise in chronic pain, chronic fatigue, ME (Myalgic Encephalomyelitis) and fibromyalgia.

For patients over 65 they offer a postural stability programme for people at risk of falls. Some patients currently under hospital outpatient care (for example rheumatology) may be transferred to Connect by their consultant if it is felt appropriate.

Why have I been referred to Connect and not to the hospital to see a specialist?

For a lot of MSK problems such as back pain and joint pain, you can be successfully treated by a specialist MSK therapist in the community without needing to see a hospital consultant. The community MSK therapist can see you for treatment or in some cases can simply give you advice around self-care and exercises, which could be by telephone. For this reason the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) has asked all GPs in west Hertfordshire to refer patients to Connect if they need help with a MSK related problem.

Connect offers some services that previously were only offered in a hospital. They have hospital specialists running clinics and the aim is that these clinics and services will expand.

When your GP refers you to Connect, experienced clinicians will look at the information provided and if they feel that you need hospital care you will be contacted (usually within a week) to book a hospital appointment.



Even if you have been told previously (either by a hospital specialist or private clinic) that you should be referred directly to hospital, your GP will still need to refer you first to Connect. In this way we can make sure that all patients have their care coordinated through a single point and they are seen by the right person for their needs and in the right place. Often this will be in the community but Connect might also refer you back to the specialist if they feel this is appropriate.

How will Connect contact me?

Unlike some NHS services, rather than always arranging for you to have a face-to-face appointment, Connect might first of all arrange a telephone appointment to talk to you about how best to organise your care.

If you use a mobile phone Connect will send you a text (SMS) message about your appointment. It is therefore very important that your GP knows if you regularly use a mobile phone and, if so, they have your current mobile phone number. Connect also has a web portal that you can log on to securely to get details about your appointment and see electronic copies of your letters. Patients have found this service very useful. If you do not have a mobile phone or access to the internet Connect will contact you using your landline or by post.

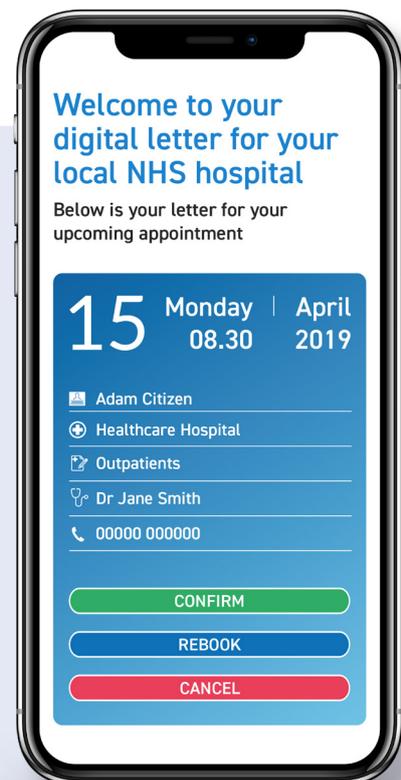
Telephone contact may not be suitable for some people, and in this situation Connect will arrange for you to have a face to face appointment. It is important that you inform your GP of any particular communication needs you may have and that they in turn inform Connect.

The details of how the communication system works with Connect will be given or sent to you.

Below is a visual of the appointment booking portal patients can access via their mobile phone alongside some of the options available once in the portal.

What else can I do?

- Add the appointment to your digital calendar
- Access information anywhere by smartphone, tablet or desktop
- Work out your appointment travel plans with a real time map
- By clicking on this icon, letter content can be read in multiple languages





What treatments do Connect offer and how does the care I receive happen?

Connect has a wide range of options to help treat you, depending on your needs. They may offer you a telephone appointment with a physiotherapist or other specialist, a face to face appointment with a physiotherapist or other specialist or they may refer you to the hospital for further treatment.

While you are under the care of Connect if you have any questions or concerns about your problem, appointments or your self-care regime at home, you can contact Connect directly for information and advice by calling **01442 913356**. Lines are open between 8:30 and 5:00 pm Monday to Friday (Note that lines are busiest on Mondays, and on mornings so you may want to try to call outside of these times). Connect will also answer any questions you have for up to six months after you have been discharged by them. You do not need to return to your GP for this problem.

I have heard that Connect only give out exercises to do and I am concerned that without seeing the physiotherapist face to face the treatment or exercises they have suggested will not help me?

The treatment that Connect offers is based on the latest national medical guidelines. Increasingly the medical evidence shows that many common MSK problems can be resolved through home exercises and general advice over a period of time. Hands on physiotherapy is often not necessary and does not make any difference to the final outcome.

For this reason Connect will often initially give you general advice and exercise programmes that you can carry out at home. For most people this will resolve the problem. If this approach is not working in the time that the therapist suggested, you can contact Connect for advice and an appointment.

Connect will provide hands-on treatments when there is evidence that patients will benefit more from these.

Connect will organise tests and scans to help with diagnosis if needed. However, in many cases a scan may not be necessary or helpful for the therapist or specialist to treat you.

I have already seen a physiotherapist or osteopath for my problem, so what is the value in being referred to a Connect therapist?

There is a wide range of specialists working for Connect. This often gives an advantage over single practitioners in that there is a team of experts who can discuss your problem and develop a specific care programme to meet your needs involving a range of therapies.

Connect therapists will assess the treatment you have already received and if they feel that they could still help you with more physical treatment and/or exercises they will offer this.

They may also arrange a face to face appointment with you to confirm the diagnosis and then offer different treatment options, arrange for you to have diagnostic tests or refer you to a hospital specialist.

Where can I go for treatment?

Connect runs clinics from a health centres, GP surgeries and gyms across west Hertfordshire. For a list of locations go to the [Connect Health website](#).



If you have any concerns or you cannot make your appointment date, or if your planned surgery has been re-scheduled, please contact Connect on **01442 913356**



Further advice and guidance can be found online via hertsvalleys.connecthealth.co.uk