

# Worried about using digital health services?

**If you have concerns about going online to access health services, you're not alone.**

This guide provides information about common worries about using digital health services, and suggests questions you can ask to find out more.



This guide has been produced with input from people who, either personally or through family members, have faced challenges doing things online. It has been published by Good Things Foundation with support from the VCSE Health & Wellbeing Alliance

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**Digital health services are online services and tools for health that you access through a smartphone, tablet or computer.**

Digital health services can include:



Online platforms for booking appointments



The NHS App (appointments, information, prescriptions)



Video consultations



Other apps for monitoring health or receiving treatment

Use this guide to help you explore your options around using digital health services. It offers:

- questions you can ask
- stories of people's concerns and choices with digital health services
- links to more information.

**Feel free to talk through your concerns with someone you trust.**

**You can ask questions of healthcare staff, receptionists and community workers to help you access care that suits you best.**



# 1. Concerned about what happens to your personal information?

**Many people feel uneasy about sharing their data online and want to know who can view their health information. If you have concerns, it's OK to ask your GP or other healthcare staff about how your information is stored and shared.**

**Here are some questions you could ask:**



- Who can see the information I provide for an online service like booking an appointment or seeing my test results?
- Who can I speak to when I need to check if a text or email about my healthcare is real, and not a scam?
- How can I check and update who has access to my health records?



**Naveed**, 62, has always been cautious about sharing personal information

online. When his GP practice introduced online appointment booking, he was worried about who could access his medical history and whether the system was secure.

After discussing his concerns with the receptionist at the

surgery, he learned that the system was secure and approved by the NHS. The receptionist explained this means only authorised healthcare professionals can see his data.

Although Naveed still prefers phone booking for urgent matters, he now feels more confident using the online system for routine appointments.

## Find out more

Read more about how the NHS uses personal data and keeps it safe:  
<https://digital.nhs.uk/your-data>



## 2. Concerned that digital health care will feel less personal?

Some people worry that talking about their health and symptoms online will be harder than in person. They're concerned this could mean they don't get the right care.

Here are some questions you can ask to make sure you get the care that's best for you:



- If I don't feel my concerns were properly understood during a phone or video consultation, who should I speak to?
- How can I request an in-person appointment if I feel a phone or video consultation isn't right for me?



**Leah**, 41, has a young child with asthma and often needs to book GP appointments, request inhaler prescriptions, and check test results. She was initially concerned that using digital health services might feel impersonal, especially regarding her child's health.

She started by using online appointment booking and found it more convenient than waiting on hold. She then started using the NHS App to request repeat prescriptions, which saved her time.

When her child's symptoms became worse, the surgery initially offered Leah a phone consultation. She explained that she would prefer an in-person appointment, which was arranged.

Leah now uses digital services for practical tasks like booking appointments and prescriptions but chooses in-person appointments for more serious concerns.



### 3. Concerned that digital health services will be difficult to use?

**Some people worry that setting up digital health services will be complicated and that they might make a mistake.**

**Sometimes these services can be a little tricky to use. It's OK to ask for support to get started. Here are some questions you can ask:**



- Who can I speak to if I find it difficult to use an online health service?
- If I make a mistake when booking an appointment or filling in a form online, how can I speak to someone to get this fixed?
- Can I try out an online service before I need to use it for something urgent?



**Ailsa**, 72, isn't confident with technology and finds online forms frustrating. When

she received a text from her GP practice asking her to book an appointment online, she didn't know where to start and worried she might press the wrong button.

She visited her local community centre, where a volunteer helped her go through the

process. She also spoke to the practice receptionist, who reassured her that she could still book by phone if she ever found the online system too difficult.

Although Ailsa still prefers booking over the phone, she now knows how to use the online system when needed. She also feels more confident asking for help when things don't work.

#### Find out more

The Learn My Way platform offers free training for digital skills, including using digital health services:

<https://www.learnmyway.com/>

**Learn  
My Way**



## 4. Concerned that you don't have a choice around digital health services?

**Some people feel that digital health services are being forced upon them. They are worried that they have no choice about how to make appointments or receive care.**

**You can always ask about your options for non-digital care, to make sure you're receiving care in the best way for you. Here are some questions you could ask:**



- Can I still request an urgent appointment over the phone or in person instead of using an online system?
- Can I switch between digital and in-person services depending on my needs?
- If I try a digital service but later decide I prefer in-person care, can I switch back?



**Robbie**, 38, helps to care for his father, who has a long-term condition.

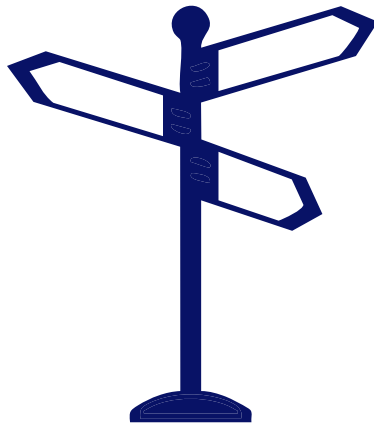
Robbie was initially worried that digital health services would make it harder to get in-person GP practice appointments when needed.

With Robbie's help, his father has had a couple of successful video consultations about his condition, meaning they didn't need to visit the surgery. However, Robbie will request in-person appointments for any urgent issues that arise for his father.

Robbie found he saved time by using online booking for his father's check-ups and requesting repeat prescriptions through the NHS App. It was also less stressful.

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Please see the links to more information and guidance on the next page.



## Get more support and information

Find organisations local to you who can provide support around doing more online:

<https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/find-support>

Help and support with using the NHS App (England):

<https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-app/nhs-app-help-and-support/>

Help and support with using NHS 24 Online App (Scotland):

<http://nhs24.scot/nhs24-online-app>

Help and support with using the NHS App (Wales):

<https://apphelp.nhs.wales/>

Help and support with using the My Care App (Northern Ireland):

<https://dhcni.hscni.net/digital-portfolio/encompass/my-care/>