

A first appointment

Your first appointment with a psychiatrist

What will happen?

Your first appointment with a psychiatrist will usually be 1–1.5 hours long.

Your psychiatrist will:

- listen to you talk about your concerns and symptoms
- ask questions about your general health
- ask about your family history
- take your blood pressure and do a basic physical check-up if it's required
- ask you to fill out a questionnaire.

There will usually be a lot of questions. The long appointment gives the psychiatrist time to listen to you and hear your whole story.

They might also want to speak with other health professionals or members of your family.

Your psychiatrist may order some more tests to help them understand what is going on.

Getting a diagnosis and treatment plan

It might take a few appointments for your psychiatrist to make a full diagnosis.

The next step is to work out a treatment plan.

A treatment plan is a combination of therapies that suit your health needs, personal preferences, family situation and age.

You and your psychiatrist will work together to develop a treatment plan that's right for you.

The psychiatrist might provide the treatment themselves, or they might recommend you see another health professional – for example a psychologist.

➤ More about the treatments used by psychiatrists
yourhealthinmind.org/treatments-medication

What should I do before my appointment?

Call the clinic

When you telephone the practice, clinic or hospital to make an appointment, ask about:

- the psychiatrist's qualifications
- whether they have expertise in particular conditions, treatments or groups of patients
- what their fees are
- payment methods (e.g. credit card, EFTPOS) in Australia, some idea of how much you might get back from Medicare, and if they can they process the refund for you
- their cancellation policy and possible fees for this
- their policy about contact with the practice or psychiatrist
- if they have admission rights at any private hospitals
- if you're changing psychiatrists, whether they need a 'transfer of care' letter from your previous psychiatrist
- whether you need to bring the referral letter to the appointment or send it ahead of time.

Read any information provided

Read through any information that the clinic or practice manager has sent to you.

Prepare some questions

Try to write a list of questions you'd like your psychiatrist to answer.

Also think about or write down:

- the symptoms you have
- any stresses in your life
- other medical conditions you have
- any medication, herbal supplements or vitamins you're taking (how many, how often you take them and the tablet strength)
- ideas about what's helped or not helped in the past
- the supports you have (family, friends, colleagues, sporting groups etc.).

Collect up your paperwork

Bring in any documents you already have, such as your referral letter, blood test results or scans.

If you've done some research already, feel free to bring in the information or web links.

Can I bring someone with me?

You can bring a family member or friend to an appointment if you want. They can wait for you outside or come in for all or part of the appointment.

You don't have to bring someone if you don't want to.

What about confidentiality?

Anything you talk about with your psychiatrist is confidential.

Your psychiatrist may need to share some of your private information with other healthcare professionals.

Your psychiatrist might suggest involving family members in your assessment. They will discuss this with you first.

A psychiatrist may be required by law to share information or a person's medical record with others. Generally, your psychiatrist will tell you first if they need to do this.

What happens next?

After your first visit, the appointments might be shorter. Your psychiatrist will focus on checking your progress and adjusting treatments.

If your psychiatrist is providing you with psychological treatments (talking therapies), you will probably see them regularly.

Your psychiatrist might recommend you go back to your GP for regular check-ups. They may also arrange for you to see a psychologist, social worker or other therapist.

If your referral was for a second opinion or management plan only, you usually won't need to go back for another appointment.

Remember

- ✓ It can be useful to do some preparation before your appointment.
- ✓ Call the clinic, hospital or health service if you have questions before your appointment.
- ✓ You get a say in any treatment that is recommended for you.
- ✓ You can bring someone with you to an appointment.

This fact sheet is also available online at yourhealthinmind.org

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About us

Psychiatrists are doctors who specialise in mental health.

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists:

- trains and supports psychiatrists
- advocates for better mental health for our communities
- sets standards in psychiatry.



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This is a general guide only, and does not replace individual medical advice. Please speak to your doctor for advice about your situation. The RANZCP is not liable for any consequences arising from relying on this information. Subject matter experts, people with lived experience of mental illness and carers all contributed to this fact sheet.