

Starting university can be an exciting yet overwhelming time for many students. For those managing mental health challenges, deciding whether to share your situation with academic education.clickdo.co.uk staff or seek medical support through your GP can feel like a tricky balancing act. This post breaks down what to consider, practical steps for booking GP appointments, and useful tips on managing prescriptions — all without the usual confusing jargon.

Why This Question Matters

It's completely normal to wonder whether to talk to your lecturer about your mental health first or to book an appointment with your GP. Both routes have their role to play, but knowing how and when to use each service can save you stress and time.

- **Academic Staff Support** can provide reasonable adjustments such as extra time on assignments or flexible deadlines.
- **GP Services**
- **University Wellbeing Services**

Step 1: Get Registered With a GP — Preferably During Freshers Week

If you haven't already, register with a local GP near your university as early as possible. Freshers week is the best time because many surgeries expect a spike in student registrations — the earlier, the better for appointment availability.

- **How to Register:** Visit the GP surgery's website or call directly. You'll need your Student ID, proof of address (like a tenancy agreement), and usually some ID like a passport.
- **Why Early Registration Helps:** It avoids long waiting times later in the term when everyone else is facing the same problems, especially from week seven onwards when stress peaks and November dips occur.
- **Temporary GP Registration:** If you miss Freshers, most areas offer temporary registrations, but these aren't always ideal for ongoing care.

Step 2: Understand Pharmacy-First Care for Common Mental Health Conditions

For some mental health symptoms like mild anxiety or depression, pharmacists can be an excellent first port of call. Many pharmacies now offer consultations and can recommend over-the-counter remedies or direct you to local services.



- **Why Check With Pharmacy First?** They're easy to access without appointments and can often provide immediate advice or direct you to suitable support.
- **Pharmacy Services Include:**
 - Advice on coping mechanisms
 - Signposting to counselling or support groups
 - Monitoring medication side effects
- **Limitations:** Pharmacy staff cannot prescribe medication for mental health — that's your GP's role.

Step 3: Making a GP Appointment and What to Expect

Once registered, book a GP appointment when you feel your mental health is affecting your daily life or academic performance. Here's a simple checklist to get you started:

1. Call or book online as early in the day as possible — many surgeries have same-day slots for urgent mental health concerns.
2. Be honest but concise about your symptoms; you don't need to share every detail if you're not comfortable.
3. Ask your GP about available treatments, including medication and referrals to university wellbeing services or counselling.
4. Discuss how to manage prescriptions if you split time between home and university addresses.

Remember, your GP can also give you a 'fit note' if mental health issues impact your ability to attend classes or deadlines, which helps with academic staff support.

Step 4: Navigating Prescription Charges, Exemptions, and Avoiding Overpaying

Many students worry about the cost of repeat prescriptions for mental health medication. Here's what you need to know about saving money:

Topic Details Prescription Charges (England) Each NHS prescription currently costs £9.35. This can add up quickly if you need monthly medication. Exemptions Certain conditions and groups are exempt, like those with specific medical conditions, under 18, students on low income, or those receiving some benefits. Check if you qualify. NHS Low Income Scheme If you're on a tight budget, apply for this scheme to get help with prescription costs. The application is online or via form HC1. Prepayment Certificates (PPCs) With a PPC, you pay a fixed sum upfront (3 months or 12 months) to cover as many prescriptions as you need, saving money if you have multiple monthly items.

Math: Is a Prepayment Certificate Worth It?

Here's a quick calculation for 2024:

- Single prescription charge: £9.35
- 3-month PPC: £31.25
- 12-month PPC: £105.90

If you take **four or more prescription items** each month for three months, the 3-month PPC saves you money. Over a year, if you regularly have monthly prescriptions, the 12-month PPC is cheaper.

Step 5: Communicating With Academic Staff

Once you've booked your GP appointment and have some medical input, it may feel easier to approach your lecturer or academic tutor. Here's how to do it with clear next steps:

1. **Choose the right time:** Early in the term is usually better, preferably before exams or important deadlines.
2. **Keep it simple:** You don't have to disclose everything if you're not comfortable. A brief message like, "I've been managing some health difficulties and would appreciate some support with coursework deadlines," is enough.
3. **Request adjustments formally:** Your university's disability or wellbeing office can help with documentation to confirm any academic staff support.
4. **Follow up:** Keep an eye on the support you receive and don't hesitate to ask for review meetings.

Useful Social Media Tools and Support Communities

Sometimes it's easier to talk to peers who understand university mental health challenges:

- **Facebook groups:** Many universities have private wellbeing or student support groups where you can read others' experiences and find local resources.
- **Twitter:** Follow mental health charities and university wellbeing accounts for tips, events, and up-to-date advice. Accounts often share mental health awareness campaigns relevant to students.

Summary Checklist: Your First Steps for Managing Mental Health at University

1. Register with a GP close to your university during Freshers week.
2. Consider pharmacy advice for mild symptoms before a GP visit.
3. Book a GP appointment if symptoms affect your studies or wellbeing.
4. Explore prescription charges, exemptions, and NHS Low Income Scheme.

5. Decide if a Prepayment Certificate could save you money.
6. Carefully inform academic staff about your needs for reasonable adjustments.
7. Use university wellbeing and social media communities for peer support.

Remember, mental health is a journey with ups and downs. Taking these clear steps early can make your university experience smoother and less stressful — and you don't have to do it alone.

