

Patient Frequently Asked Questions Virtual Group Consultations (VGCs)

Q: What are Virtual Group Consultations and what are the benefits?

A: Virtual Group Consultations (VGC's) are a way for you to connect with your healthcare team (doctor, nurse, pharmacist etc), and other people who live with the same health condition as you. These consultations are run as group sessions to allow you to spend more time with your healthcare team and discuss the things that matter to you. The group are then able to support each other and share ideas on keeping well. You will also receive personalised clinical and lifestyle care from your clinician.

They are a great way for you to receive care and reassurance at a time when you may not be able to visit your practice or hospital and see your healthcare team. People who have attended Group Consultations tell us they really enjoy them and that they feel more confident to manage their health and keep well, as well as being able to get support and advice from other patients in how they are managing their condition.

Q: Can I get my regular health checks in a Virtual Group Consultation?

A: Yes, many practices are now offering the choice of having your yearly health check in a 90-minute Virtual Group Consultation rather than a rushed shorter appointment. This gives you more time to share what matters to you and any challenges you may have.

Q: How do I join a Virtual Group Consultation and what equipment do I need?

A: You will be invited by your practice and sent a link to join the session. You will need an email account and device e.g. mobile, smartphone/iPad/computer and access to the internet in a private space.

Q: What happens in a Virtual Group Consultation session?

A: Once you've clicked the link to join in, you will be welcomed by a member of your GP practice team who will welcome you to the session and confirm your identity and that you have completed the confidentiality process. The Virtual Group Consultations facilitator will then start the session and explain how the session will run. Each member of the group (often 8-10 participants) will then introduce themselves. The clinician will then join the session and cover any common themes or queries with the group before checking with each patient individually. Once the clinical session has ended the facilitator will then bring the session to an end and signpost you to any additional support or resources.

Q: How 'safe' is it to take part in a remote Virtual Group Consultation and how can I protect my privacy

A: The sessions are encrypted however you will need to make sure you have the right anti spy software on your device. Most devices have this automatically installed. VGC's are not recorded and everyone taking part must adhere to consent and confidentiality which is laid out in your patient confidentiality form. Your consent to take part is then recorded in your patient records. To further protect you we advise that you log out of existing platforms and sign back in as a guest. This means that information like your email address will not be seen by other members of the group

All participants are asked to sign a Virtual Group Consultations Confidentiality agreement before they take part in a Virtual Group Consultation. This states that they agree not to share any information discussed within the group. This confidentiality agreement is set out at the beginning of the session and repeated throughout the group session to ensure everyone understands.

You will be asked to share some relevant information about your condition that will be shared with the group in the form of a results/discussion board. For example, in a diabetes group this might include your blood glucose levels, blood pressure and other relevant tests.

Q: What happens if I change my mind when I'm in a Virtual Group Consultation?

A: Don't worry if this happens just let the facilitator know and you can leave the session at any time and book a one to one appointment later on.

Q: What happens if I need to have any blood tests or checks before I join a Virtual Group Consultation?

A: Your facilitator will write to you before your Virtual Group Consultation to let you know if you need to have any particular tests before the session. It is useful to bring with you any home recordings of weight, blood pressure and blood sugar readings you may have.

Q: Can my carer, partner or friend join me in my Virtual Group Consultation?

A: Yes, with your agreement. It is often very useful for carers or family members to join in. Please note however that they will also need to agree to confidentiality and confirm their identity just like other participants.

Q: Can I record my Virtual Group Consultation session?

A: No, to ensure all information shared in the session is kept confidential and your privacy respected, you will be asked to adhere to the 'VGC Confidentiality Agreement'. This asks you not to record, share or post any aspect of the session. This ensures everyone's privacy