



*National Institute for  
Health and Clinical Excellence*

## **About NICE guidance: what does it mean for me?**

**Information for patients, carers and the  
public – an interim guide**

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This is an interim document that describes the various types of NICE guidance. It is to be used alongside the Institute's 'Understanding NICE guidance' series, which explains individual pieces of guidance to patients and their carers. A guide to NICE's work is currently in development and when it is published it will replace this document.

## **What is NICE?**

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) is the independent organisation responsible for providing national guidance on promoting good health and preventing and treating ill health.

NICE produces four types of guidance: technology appraisal guidance, clinical guidelines, interventional procedure guidance and public health guidance. This document explains the different types of NICE guidance.

## **Technology appraisal guidance**

One of NICE's roles is to produce guidance (advice) on the use of new and existing medicines and treatments within the NHS. This type of guidance is called a 'technology appraisal'. The term 'technology' covers:

- drugs
- medical devices (for example, hearing aids or inhalers)
- diagnostic techniques (tests used to identify diseases)
- surgical procedures (for example, repairing hernias)
- health promotion activities (for example, ways of helping people with diabetes manage their condition).

NICE is asked to look at particular technologies when people's access to them varies across the country. This may be because of different prescribing or funding policies in different areas. Or it may be because there is confusion or uncertainty over how well a technology works, and how much value for money it offers to the NHS and patients. NICE is also asked to look at some new drugs and devices while they are being licensed for safety by the regulatory authorities, so that the NHS will have advice on how to use them as

soon as they are licensed. NICE looks at the available evidence on the use of the technology and produces guidance that will help the NHS in England and Wales decide when it should be used. Our advice helps to end uncertainty and standardise access to healthcare across the country.

To produce technology appraisal guidance, NICE looks at how well the technology works. It also looks at how well it works in relation to how much it costs – is it value for money? NICE recognises that something can be both expensive and value for money.

An independent group of experts (NICE's Appraisal Committee) reads and hears evidence from:

- good-quality studies of the technology being appraised
- doctors with specialist knowledge of the condition for which it is being used, and the treatment available
- individuals with specialist knowledge of the issues affecting people with the condition for which it is being used, including patients using the technology themselves
- organisations representing the views of people who will be affected by the guidance (because they have, or care for someone with, the condition or because they work in the NHS and are involved in providing care for people with the condition)
- the manufacturer of the technology.

### ***What does it mean?***

NICE technology appraisal guidance looks at one or more treatments for a particular clinical condition. However, these may not be the only treatments available for the same condition. Your healthcare team should talk to you about whether the treatment recommended by NICE is suitable for you, and about other treatment options that may be available.

### **If a treatment is recommended by NICE**

Since January 2002, the NHS has been legally obliged to provide funding and resources in England and Wales for medicines and treatments recommended by NICE's technology appraisal guidance. This means that when NICE

recommends a technology, the NHS must ensure it is available to those people it could help, normally within 3 months of the guidance being issued. So, if your doctors think a recommended technology is right for you, you should be able to have it on the NHS. If your doctors think a technology that NICE has recommended is right for you but it is not available, your first point of contact for help and support should be your local NHS Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) if you live in England, or your local Community Health Council (CHC) if you live in Wales. You can find details of your local PALS at [www.pals.nhs.uk](http://www.pals.nhs.uk) or your local CHC at [www.patienthelp.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.patienthelp.wales.nhs.uk). Alternatively you can phone NHS Direct on 0845 46 47 or contact your local hospital, clinic, GP surgery or health centre.

However, your doctors may advise you that a treatment that NICE has recommended for most patients is not right for you. For example, you may already be taking a medicine for another health condition that will interact badly with the one that NICE has recommended. If your doctors think a technology that NICE has recommended for most patients is not the right option for you, they should be able to explain why in a way that you can understand.

### **If a treatment is not recommended by NICE**

NICE may not recommend a particular treatment. This is usually because there is not enough reliable evidence that a particular technology is a more effective treatment than others for the same condition. This means that for the time being it should not be prescribed routinely on the NHS, and your doctor should talk to you about other treatment options available to you.

### ***Versions of this guidance***

NICE publishes three versions of technology appraisal guidance. You can download these documents from this website.

- The full guidance on the appraisal (the recommendations and a summary of all the evidence).
- A quick reference guide – a short version for healthcare professionals.

- Understanding NICE guidance – a description of the guidance written for people with a specific condition and their carers.

## **Clinical guidelines**

Clinical guidelines recommend appropriate treatment and care of people with specific conditions or diseases in the NHS in England and Wales. The recommendations in a NICE guideline are prepared by a group of healthcare professionals, people representing the views of those who have or care for someone with the condition in question, and scientists. The group looks at the available evidence on the best way of treating or managing the condition, and makes recommendations based on this evidence.

### ***What the recommendations cover***

NICE clinical guidelines can look at different areas of diagnosis, treatment, care, self-help or a combination of these. These areas are outlined in a document called the scope at the start of guideline development.

### ***What does it mean?***

In general, doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals in the NHS are expected to follow NICE's clinical guidelines. But there will be times when the recommendations will not be suitable for someone because of his or her specific medical condition, general health, wishes or a combination of these.

If you think your treatment or care does not match that described in the relevant 'Understanding NICE guidance' booklet, please talk to a member of your healthcare team. If you live in England, your local Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) will also be able to offer you information and support. If you live in Wales, your local Community Health Council (CHC) will be able to do this. You can find details of your local PALS at [www.pals.nhs.uk](http://www.pals.nhs.uk) or your local CHC at [www.patienthelp.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.patienthelp.wales.nhs.uk). Alternatively you can phone NHS Direct on 0845 46 47 or contact your local hospital, clinic, GP surgery or health centre.

## ***Versions of clinical guidelines***

NICE publishes four versions of each clinical guideline. You can download these documents from this website.

- The full guideline, which contains all the recommendations on the condition, details of how they were developed, and summaries of the evidence they were based on.
- A version called the NICE guideline, which lists all the recommendations on the condition.
- A quick reference guide – a summary of the NICE guideline for healthcare professionals.
- Understanding NICE guidance – a description of the guidance written for people with the condition and their carers.

For more information about how NICE guidelines are developed you can download the booklet 'The guideline development process – an overview for stakeholders, the public and the NHS' (2006 edition) from the website.

## **Interventional procedure guidance**

An interventional procedure is used for diagnosis or treatment and involves one of the following.

- Making a cut or a hole to gain access to the inside of a patient's body – for example, when carrying out an operation or inserting a tube into a blood vessel.
- Gaining access to a body cavity (such as the digestive system, lungs, womb or bladder) without cutting into the body – for example, examining or carrying out treatment on the inside of the stomach using an instrument inserted via the mouth.
- Using electromagnetic radiation (which includes X-rays, lasers, gamma-rays and ultraviolet light) – for example, using a laser to treat eye problems.

This type of NICE guidance looks at whether interventional procedures are safe enough and work well enough to be used routinely, or whether special arrangements are needed for patient consent (agreement). This guidance applies to the NHS in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The guidance is produced by an independent group of experts that includes healthcare professionals and representatives of patients and carers. To produce this guidance, NICE:

- looks at the results of studies on the safety of the procedure and how well it works
- asks experts for their opinions
- asks the views of the organisations that speak for the healthcare professionals and the patients and carers who will be affected by the guidance.

### ***What does it mean?***

NICE interventional procedure guidance looks at one or more procedures for a particular condition. However, these may not be the only procedures or treatments available for that condition. Your healthcare team should talk to you about whether the procedure that has been assessed by NICE is suitable for you, and about other options that may be available.

### **When NICE has issued guidance**

Most interventional procedures NICE looks at are quite new. This means that there may not be a lot of information available about how well a procedure works, how safe it is and which patients may benefit most from it.

Interventional procedure guidance makes sure that new procedures are introduced safely into the NHS. Part of the purpose of this guidance is to make sure doctors fully explain the procedure and any uncertainties there may be about the potential benefits and risks to patients. This discussion is essential to help patients reach a decision about whether or not to agree (consent) to the procedure.

## **When NICE has not issued guidance**

The other treatment options that are available for a particular condition may not have been assessed by NICE – particularly if they are procedures that have been performed routinely in the NHS for a long time and have a proven safety record. You should talk through the pros and cons of all options with your doctors directly.

## ***Versions of this guidance***

NICE publishes two versions of this guidance. You can download these documents from this website.

- The full guidance.
- Understanding NICE guidance – information for people who have been offered a particular procedure.

The overview – a summary of the evidence that NICE considered – is also on this website.

## **Public health guidance**

NICE public health guidance provides recommendations on the promotion of good health and the prevention of ill health. The guidance is for people working in the NHS, local authorities and the wider public, and private and voluntary sectors.

There are two types of NICE public health guidance.

- Public health intervention guidance – recommendations on clear types of activity ('interventions'), provided by local organisations, that help to reduce people's risk of developing a disease or condition or help to promote or maintain a healthy lifestyle.
- Public health programme guidance – this deals with broader action for the promotion of good health and the prevention of ill health. This guidance may focus on a topic, such as smoking; on a particular population, such as young people; or on a particular setting, for example, the workplace.

### ***What the recommendations cover***

NICE public health guidance can look at preventing ill health, promoting good health, or a combination of these. These areas are outlined in a document called the scope at the start of guidance development.

### ***What does it mean?***

In general, doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals in the NHS are expected to follow NICE's public health guidance. But there will be times when the recommendations will not be suitable for someone because of his or her specific medical condition, general health, wishes or a combination of these.

If you think your treatment or care does not match that described in the relevant guidance, please talk to a member of your healthcare team. If you live in England, your local Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) will also be able to offer you information and support. If you live in Wales, your local Community Health Council (CHC) will be able to do this. You can find details of your local PALS at [www.pals.nhs.uk](http://www.pals.nhs.uk) or your local CHC at [www.patienthelp.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.patienthelp.wales.nhs.uk). Alternatively you can phone NHS Direct on 0845 46 47 or contact your local hospital, clinic, GP surgery or health centre.

### ***Versions of this guidance***

NICE publishes one version of this guidance, for healthcare professionals and members of the public. You can download these documents from this website.