

No one likes to have health concerns, especially not in a foreign country. But if this happens the medical professionals of Huisartsenpraktijk Watergraafsmeer are there to support you. You can be assured that you will receive high quality health care in The Netherlands. However, some things will be arranged in a different way than you are used to. On this page we will explain the most important differences.

General Practitioner

If you need a doctor, you can call to make an appointment to consult a General Practitioner (GP, family doctor or huisarts in Dutch). If you have any medical questions or problems, you contact your GP first. Through your general practitioner you will have access to all the services of the Dutch medical system.

For many newcomers the single most important difference between medical practice in The Netherlands and that of other countries is the predominant role of the GP. Your GP is the key to the Dutch world of medicine.

The General Practitioner is a trained specialist in treating the most common problems, such as respiratory diseases, musculoskeletal symptoms, skin conditions, diabetes, common pediatric diseases, gynecological and even psychosocial complaints. He (or she) can also perform small surgical procedures, e.g. a removal of a mole or place an IUD. A GP is also trained to recognize when a condition is more complex and you need to be seen by another health care specialist. Your GP coordinates the health care that you need and keeps your medical record up to date and confidential.

Scheduling Appointments

When you call your GP's office to make an appointment, the GP's assistant (doktersassistent), a trained professional, will ask questions to determine the urgency of your situation. The GP's assistant is a professional and has obligatory confidentiality. Asking questions is done only to have the patient and the doctor better prepared, to suggest alternatives, like a consultation by phone, or in some cases, to check if more immediate action is required. Each consultation is scheduled for 10 minutes. If you have more than one topic please inform the assistant so we can book more time. Home visits are reserved for urgent cases and people incapable of visiting the GP's office.

Consultation by phone

For short questions, blood test results or if you want to discuss something with the doctor, you can request a telephone consultation. You can make an appointment with the GP's assistant. In some cases the assistant is able to answer your questions.

Referral for specialist medical care

If your GP cannot diagnose or treat a problem (s)he will refer you to a specialist. Your GP will usually provide you with a digital letter of referral to be sent to the specialist. The hospital will either call you or you call them for an appointment. You may have to wait several weeks or more for an appointment, unless the matter is urgent. Some insurance companies can work with you to help to speed up your appointment.

Preventative Care and Health Checks

The Netherlands has good nation-wide preventive health programs. Preventive health programs are available at different stages in an individual's development and most are free of charge. There are screening programs during pregnancy and several after a child is born such as developmental check ups and a preventative vaccination programme. These check-ups are done by the Ouder Kind Centrum (OKC) or Consultation Bureau. There are also population screenings later in life for diseases such as breast, cervical and colon cancer. Apart from that there are also screening options available for people at risk for certain diseases such as cardiovascular, pulmonary or sexually transmitted diseases. Ask your GP about nation-wide preventive health programs and services. A general check-up is not recommended in the Netherlands This is because scientific evidence suggests that general health checks are unlikely to be beneficial and may cause harm. If you are concerned and still may wish for a general check up please contact your GP to discuss the matter.

Medication

Most medicines require a prescription from your GP after a personal consultation, since they can be potentially harmful. However, after a consultation, it is possible you will receive a diagnosis but no medication. Dutch physicians believe it is often best to let an illness run its course without expensive and potentially dangerous tests and medication. This wait-and-see approach is medically appropriate for minor illnesses such as a sore throat or a common cold. That being said we do also encourage a shared decision model, where patients and doctors construct a treatment plan together. If possible, show the medicine that you were on back home to the GP, who can prescribe this medication or find you an appropriate alternative. Prescriptions are filled at a pharmacy.

Pregnancy and birth

In the Netherlands, pregnancy is considered a natural event. Home deliveries are common; about 30% of first babies and 65% of second babies are born at home. Of course you can also choose to deliver in a hospital, but without a medical need this may lead to additional costs. Check with your healthcare insurer which conditions apply.

Maternity and neonatal care is of the highest quality in the Netherlands. There is a unique system of midwives and gynaecologists. Midwives monitor the healthy pregnancies and regular births. A gynecologist steps in when complications arise. A midwife (who has a 4 year bachelor degree) is primarily a medical expert. But, aside from this, she is also a coach and a confidant during the whole pregnancy period.

If you are pregnant, the first thing to do is to consult your GP or midwife. Your GP is there to provide general medical advice and your midwife will start with the regular maternity care. You are free to choose your own midwife, who will meet with you regularly throughout your pregnancy and monitor your health and the wellbeing of your baby.