

Cystic Fibrosis *our focus*

Prescription charges

Factsheet – April 2019

Cystic fibrosis and prescription charges

Introduction

Prescription charges have now been abolished entirely for people in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. However in England many people with cystic fibrosis (CF) still have to pay for their prescriptions. This factsheet provides information about prescription charges, including who is exempt from prescription charges, current charges and the Cystic Fibrosis Trust's position on prescription charges for people with cystic fibrosis.

Written by the Cystic Fibrosis Trust.

Last updated April 2019.

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Prescription charges in the UK

In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, prescription charges have been abolished entirely, meaning no-one in those countries has to pay for their prescriptions.

In England, despite Government pledges to abolish prescription charges for all long-term conditions, many people with cystic fibrosis still have to pay for their prescriptions.

Who is exempt from prescription charges in England?

People over 60 or under 16 years of age are exempt from prescription charges. People aged 16-18 and in full time education are also exempt for the charges but you may need to show proof that you are in full time education.

In England, you are entitled to get prescriptions free of charge if you:

- are on Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, income-related Employment and Support Allowance or the guarantee credit part of Pension Credit. Your partner and children will also be entitled to free prescriptions if they are included in your benefit award.
- if you are getting Working Tax Credit and/or Child Tax Credit, you may be entitled to free prescriptions, depending on your income.
- if you're getting Universal Credit, your entitlement to free NHS prescriptions depends on your earnings for the most recent assessment period. You're entitled if your earnings during that period were:
 - £435 or less
 - £935 or less if your Universal Credit includes an element for either:
 - a child
 - limited capability for work.

People with certain medical conditions, such as diabetes and cancer, are also exempt from paying prescription charges.

Some adults with cystic fibrosis are exempt from prescription charges for other reasons, such as those still in higher education or those too ill to work. Pregnant women and those who have had a baby within the last 12 months are also exempt if they have a valid maternity exemption certificate. (You can ask your doctor, midwife or health visitor how to apply.) If you are in receipt of Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payment, and none of the benefits listed above, you may still have to pay prescription charges. You may still qualify for some help under the NHS low income scheme www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/nhs-low-income-scheme.

A helpful leaflet explaining who can get free prescriptions can be downloaded [here](#).

Why is cystic fibrosis not exempt from charges?

As mentioned, people with certain medical conditions are exempt from paying prescription charges. However, the list of exempt conditions does not include cystic fibrosis. This is because the exempt list was drawn up more than 50 years ago, in 1968, when most children with cystic fibrosis did not live into adulthood. Fortunately the outlook for people with cystic fibrosis has improved markedly since then and most people with cystic fibrosis live into adulthood, although still with a reduced life expectancy compared with the population as a whole. However the list of exempt conditions has not been properly revised since 1968 and therefore does not take account of this.

The list of medical conditions exempt from paying prescription charges is very short and does not include conditions that were undiscovered or not fully understood in 1968, it also doesn't include conditions for which treatments have since been developed. There are many conditions not included in the list. An example of some conditions not on the exemption list are arthritis, asthma, Crohn's disease, lupus, motor neurone disease and Parkinson's disease.

Many people with cystic fibrosis have to pay for all of their prescriptions unless they develop diabetes, a complication of cystic fibrosis that affects approximately 30% of people with CF and which *is* included on the exempt list.

How do prescription charges work?

Once a person is on the exempt list, they get their prescriptions for everything free of charge.

For those who do have to pay, there are two methods of payment: single items can be purchased as and when required, or a prescription prepayment certificate (PPC) can be purchased which will cover costs for 3 or 12 months and works out cheaper if a lot of prescriptions are required.

What are the current prescription charges in England?

The prescription charges in England, as of 1 April 2019, are:

- Single prescription £9.00
- Three-month PPC £29.10
- 12-month PPC £104

The Government's position

An independent report 'The Prescription Charges Review', which was undertaken by the Royal College of Physicians and published in May 2010, described how to fulfil a pledge of the Rt Hon Gordon Brown MP, to abolish prescription charges for people with long-term conditions.

However, the current Government does not recognise the issue or the concerns of the Cystic Fibrosis Trust, instead choosing to highlight exemption arrangements in England, based on age and income, via various means-tested benefits.

The Cystic Fibrosis Trust's position

The Cystic Fibrosis Trust believes that all adults with cystic fibrosis should be exempt from prescription charges, wherever they live in the UK, for the following reasons:

- Cystic fibrosis is a life-shortening medical condition for which daily medication is essential. Adults with cystic fibrosis are often considerably disadvantaged in economic terms by their condition. Further financial hardship is caused by having to pay prescription charges.
- For those adults with cystic fibrosis who are in financial difficulty, there is a danger that having to pay for prescriptions may act as a disincentive to take essential treatment.
- It is illogical and unjust that others with similar or less serious conditions are exempt from prescription charges whilst those with cystic fibrosis are not.
- Cystic fibrosis meets the requirements laid down by the British Medical Association in 1968 and accepted by the Government as criteria for exemption, specifically that conditions to be included on the exempt list should be 'readily identifiable conditions, which in virtually all cases call automatically for prolonged continuous medication.'

Cystic fibrosis fulfils all of these conditions. The only reason cystic fibrosis was not on the list in 1968 is that all children were exempt from prescription charges, thereby including all those with cystic fibrosis at the time.

The Cystic Fibrosis Trust has consulted extensively with consultants caring for people with cystic fibrosis, adults with cystic fibrosis, families of people with cystic fibrosis and professional bodies involved in healthcare. All consulted agree that cystic fibrosis meets the criteria for inclusion in the exempt list. We assume, therefore, that the Government has received no advice from any professional body that it would be inappropriate to include cystic fibrosis on the exempt list.

We do not accept that an adjustment to the exempt list could not or should not be made for cystic fibrosis because of a lack of consensus on other conditions. It is wrong to continue to discriminate against people who clearly meet the criteria of the exempt list, and who may not be covered by any other category of exemption.

We expect the Government to act because our case is clear cut and just. We want to help and we are prepared to co-operate with the Government in a positive and constructive way. However, a charity cannot and should not be expected to do the job of the NHS or the Government. The current arrangements for prescription charges for adults with cystic fibrosis are demonstrably unjustifiable. Prescription charges for those with cystic fibrosis should be abolished without further delay.

The Cystic Fibrosis Trust is part of the Prescription Charges Coalition – a group of over 40 organisations campaigning to end unfair prescription charges for people with long-term medical conditions.

The coalition actively campaigns on this issue and has published reports on prescription charges which can be found online at www.prescriptionchargescoalition.org.uk.

More information on the Prescription Prepayment Certificate (PPC) can be found online at www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/help-nhs-prescription-costs/prescription-prepayment-certificates.

A Prescription Prepayment Certificate (PPC) can be bought:

- online via <https://apps.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/ppcwebsales/patient.do>
- from a pharmacy registered to sell PPCs
- by telephone on 0300 330 1341. You will need your debit card or credit card details if you want to pay in full or bank or building society account details if you are paying for a 12-month PPC by Direct Debit.
- by post, complete the application form FP95 which is available online, in pharmacies and doctors' surgeries.

The Cystic Fibrosis Trust can offer financial help towards the first annual Prescription Prepayment Certificate. For more information about this and other grants provided by the Cystic Fibrosis Trust please contact the helpline 0300 373 1000.

To find out about the NHS Low Income Scheme visit www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/nhs-low-income-scheme. You will need to complete a HC1 form available online and from Jobcentres, GP practices, pharmacies and Citizens Advice.

A helpful leaflet explaining who can get free prescriptions can be downloaded from [here](#).

Online checking service for help with NHS prescriptions and health costs www.gov.uk/help-nhs-costs.

Further information

The Cystic Fibrosis Trust provides information about cystic fibrosis through our factsheets, leaflets and other publications.

Most of our publications are available through our helpline and can be downloaded from our website. Visit cysticfibrosis.org.uk/publications.

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The Cystic Fibrosis Trust helpline can help you with a range of issues, no matter how big or small. Our trained staff can provide a listening ear, practical advice, welfare/benefits information or direct you to other sources of support. The helpline can be contacted on 0300 373 1000 or helpline@cysticfibrosis.org.uk and is open Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm.

Calls to 0300 numbers cost no more than 5p per minute from a standard BT residential landline. Charges from other landlines and mobile networks may vary, but will be no more than a standard geographic call and are included in all inclusive minutes and discount schemes. If you are worried about the cost of the call please let us know and we'll call you back.

You can also find more information at our website cysticfibrosis.org.uk.

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More factsheets available at:
cysticfibrosis.org.uk/publications

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The information included in this publication is not intended to replace any advice you may receive from your doctor or CF multidisciplinary team and it is important that you seek medical advice whenever considering a change of treatment.

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