

## Guidance for self-care for minor ailments

### Prescribing

West Leicestershire CCG recommends that patients with minor ailments should be encouraged to self-care in the first instance either by managing symptoms through non-medicinal interventions or by purchasing treatments at local pharmacies with expert advice from pharmacy staff in management and treatment of self-limiting illnesses.

West Leicestershire CCG will support prescribers who recommend that patients seek advice from a community pharmacist and purchase an OTC medication to manage their ailment as outlined in Appendix A.

### **SECTION 1: Self-limiting illnesses suitable for self-care**

The recommendations for self-care in Appendix A reflect the advice that patients will see on the NHS choices website. The recommendations of when to seek medical advice also reflects the advice that patients will see on the NHS choices website ([link](#)).

### **SECTION 2: Medicines suitable for purchasing OTC**

The list includes the standard generic recommendations for treatment of these ailments as a guide so that patients are appropriately referred to self-care. It is not exhaustive. It does not include or recommend specific brands or products that contain several ingredients. Links to Summary of Product Characteristics of branded products is for information only and is not intended as a recommendation to prescribe any particular branded product.

There are legal restrictions in place usually relating to age, indication, duration of use and quantity when P medicines are sold OTC. Prescribers must be mindful that they don't recommend purchase of a medicine if the restriction is relevant to that individual.<sup>1-44</sup> *It is also worth noting that patient information leaflets for similar OTC preparations are often inconsistent with respect to how long it should be used for and when to see the GP for further advice.*

There is lots of self-care advice on the NHS Choices website as to how to treat and also prevent minor ailments from re-occurring. Community pharmacists can also advise the most appropriate medicine for individual patients.

## West Leicestershire Clinical Commissioning Group

It is the responsibility of the health care professional prescribing, recommending or supplying a medicine that no contraindications apply and that special precautions have been considered. A “no prescription required form” is available for practice staff to use as part of the consultation if they want to advise a patient to purchase a specific product that is unfamiliar to the patient (Appendix B). This will reduce the risk of any miscommunication between the patient and the community pharmacist.

### 3.1 Pregnant and breast feeding women and OTC restrictions

Many OTC medicines can't be sold by community pharmacists to pregnant or breast feeding women because they are unlicensed in these groups of patients. However, some simple analgesics which are used to treat many self-limiting illnesses can be sold OTC to pregnant or breast feeding women.

#### Analgesics in pregnancy

Paracetamol is the analgesic of choice during pregnancy and can be sold OTC by community pharmacists and supermarkets in small quantities.<sup>6</sup>

Preparations containing codeine or ibuprofen are generally not suitable during pregnancy and should only be prescribed following a discussion with the patient's GP.<sup>46-48</sup>

#### Analgesics in breast feeding women

Paracetamol and ibuprofen are the analgesics of choice in breast feeding women and can be sold OTC by community pharmacists and supermarkets in small quantities.<sup>6</sup> Preparations containing codeine should be avoided in breast feeding women.<sup>49</sup>

#### Further advice

The decision to start, stop, continue or change a medicine before or during pregnancy or breastfeeding should be made together with a health care professional such as the patient's GP, pharmacist or midwife. When deciding whether or not to use a medicine in pregnancy or breastfeeding it is necessary to weigh up the risks and benefits. Non pharmacological therapies should always be used first line wherever possible.

There is comprehensive advice on the NHS Choices website to inform health care professionals and patients should the need arise although the information is not intended to replace the individual care and advice with a health care provider.

<http://www.medicinesinpregnancy.org/Medicine--pregnancy/>

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/Pages/breastfeeding-and-medicines.aspx>

## 3.2 Age groups and OTC restrictions

The sale of some OTC preparations is restricted in infants and children and a few are restricted in older people. If unsure please check the summary of product characteristics or the pharmacist.

### Analgesics in infants and children

The following analgesics **cannot** be sold OTC for the following age groups:

- Paracetamol for infants < 3 months of age. <sup>6</sup>
- Ibuprofen for infants < 3 months of age. <sup>7</sup>
- Ibuprofen in infants 3-6 months <5kg body weight <sup>7</sup>
- Preparations containing codeine for children < 12 years of age. <sup>8</sup>
- Topical NSAIDs for children <12 years of age unless advised by a doctor. <sup>37-38</sup>

## 3.3 OTC medicines and restrictions in quantities that can be sold OTC

Several preparations have restrictions on the quantities that can be sold or the duration of use for which the preparation can be used under pharmacist supervision.

### 3.4 Restrictions on quantities

Products containing paracetamol can only be sold in quantities of 32 by the community pharmacy unless considered appropriate and approved by the pharmacist who can authorise the sale of up to 96 tablets for personal use.

## 4. Promoting self-care for self-limiting illnesses

Health professionals can help to empower patients to self-care by:

- Sign posting patients to the most up to date information on the NHS choices website which also gives advice on when symptoms are likely to be of a more serious nature and to seek advice from a GP.
- Educating patients at the point of care for future reference.
- Promote the “what to keep in your medicine cabinet” video on their website or in the waiting room or community pharmacies.
- Ensuring all staff are aware of the guidance.
- Liaising with local community pharmacists to ensure that patients are receiving standardised advice.
- Use the referral form (Appendix B) if appropriate to help with communication between practices, patients and community pharmacies.

## Appendix A

Please note - to view the clinical advice on NHS Choices click on the link in the guidance and then close the window asking for your log in details. The information will appear once the log in box has been closed. Alternatively enter the URL <http://www.nhs.uk/pages/home.aspx> via your web-browser and search under Health A-Z.

### Acne (mild)

#### Patient information on NHS Choices ([link](#))

Although acne can't be cured, it can be controlled with treatment. Several creams, lotions and gels for treating spots are available at pharmacies for mild acne.

#### When to seek medical advice

OTC products have failed.

Development of nodules or cysts

#### Over the counter products

Benzoyl Peroxide 2.5%, 5% and 10% topical preparations.

Nicotinamide 4% Gel

#### OTC restrictions

##### Benzoyl peroxide

Cannot be sold OTC for pregnant or breast feeding women.<sup>1,2</sup>

##### Nicotinamide

Cannot be sold OTC for pregnant women.<sup>3</sup>

### Athletes foot

#### Patient information on NHS Choices ([link](#))

Treatment usually involves anti-fungal pharmacy-bought creams, sprays or liquids and good foot hygiene.

Antifungal treatments are similarly effective, although some work faster than others. A pharmacist can recommend an antifungal medicine that's safe for you to use. Not all types are suitable for children, older people, and pregnant or breastfeeding women.

If your rash is very sore and itchy, a pharmacist may recommend using a mild steroid cream to ease any discomfort, but this should only be used for a short period and in combination with antifungal treatment.

#### When to see a GP

Symptoms lasting more than a week

Symptoms causing significant pain or discomfort.

#### Over the counter products

Miconazole 2% cream  
Clotrimazole 1% cream  
Terbinafine 1% cream

Miconazole and Clotrimazole preparations are available OTC with hydrocortisone with 1% cream

#### OTC restrictions

- Most preparations can only be used in pregnant or breast feeding women under the supervision of a doctor.<sup>3-5</sup>
- Terbinafine cannot be sold to children under 16 years.<sup>5</sup>

## Back pain in adults

### Patient information on NHS Choices ([link](#))

Back pain will usually improve within a few weeks or months. There are several things you can try to help reduce your pain in the meantime.

#### Painkillers

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) tablets, such as ibuprofen, can help relieve back pain. Many types are available to buy from pharmacies or supermarkets without a prescription.

Paracetamol on its own isn't recommended for back pain, but it may be used alongside stronger painkillers such as codeine

### When to see a GP

Pain hasn't improved after several weeks of taking OTC treatments.

Severe pain

#### Over the counter products

- Ibuprofen 200mg and 400mg
- Paracetamol and codeine (co-codamol 8/500mg)

#### OTC restrictions

- Only paracetamol can be sold OTC for pregnant women. <sup>6</sup>
- Only paracetamol or ibuprofen can be sold OTC for breast feeding women. <sup>6,7</sup>
- Quantity restriction of 32 tablets for co-codamol unless approved by the pharmacist (96). <sup>8</sup>

## Cold and Flu like symptoms

### Patient information on NHS Choices ([link](#))

A cold is a mild viral infection of the nose, throat, sinuses and upper airways. It's very common and usually clears up on its own within a week or two.

There's no cure for a cold, but you can look after yourself at home by:

- resting, drinking plenty of fluids and eating healthily
- taking over-the-counter painkillers, such as paracetamol or ibuprofen, to reduce any fever or discomfort
- using decongestant sprays or tablets to relieve a blocked nose
- trying remedies such as gargling salt water and sucking on menthol sweets.

### When to see a GP

- Symptoms persist for more than three weeks.
- Symptoms that suddenly get worse
- Breathing difficulties
- Development of complications of a cold, such as chest pain or coughing up bloodstained mucus

Concern for a baby or an elderly person, or presence a long-term illness such as a lung condition.

### Over the counter products

- Ibuprofen 200mg and 400mg tablets
- Ibuprofen 100mg/5ml suspension
- Paracetamol 500mg tablets
- Paracetamol 120mg/5ml and 240mg/5ml suspension
- Sodium Chloride decongestant 0.9% nasal spray
- Note: other OTC preparations for cold and flu symptoms are considered to be of low clinical priority but patients may wish to purchase. ([link](#))
- Hot lemon with honey has a similar effect as cough medicines.

### OTC restrictions

- Only paracetamol can be sold OTC for pregnant women.<sup>6</sup>
- Only paracetamol or ibuprofen can be sold OTC for breast feeding women.<sup>6,7</sup>
- Ibuprofen and paracetamol cannot be sold for infants < 3 months of age.<sup>6,7</sup>
- Ibuprofen cannot be sold to infants 3-6 months who are <5kg.<sup>7</sup>
- **Quantity** restriction of 32 tablets for paracetamol unless approved by the pharmacist (96)

### Cold Sores

#### Patient information on NHS Choices [\(link\)](#)

Cold sores are small blisters that develop on the lips or around the mouth. They're caused by the herpes simplex virus and usually clear up without treatment within 7 to 10 days.

However, antiviral creams are available over the counter from pharmacies without a prescription. If used correctly, these can help ease your symptoms and speed up the healing time.

#### When to see a GP

- Confirmation of diagnosis
- Severe symptoms that have spread further than the lip.
- Hasn't healed after 7 to 10 days

#### Over the counter products

Aciclovir cream 5% can reduce the duration by 1 day

#### OTC restrictions

None

### Allergic Conjunctivitis (seasonal)

#### Patient information on NHS Choices [\(link\)](#)

Eye drops are available from your pharmacist to treat the hay fever symptoms that affect your eyes, such as redness, itchiness and watering (allergic conjunctivitis). The drops contain antihistamine, such as azelastine and olopatadine, to reduce the inflammation in your eyes, which will relieve the symptoms.

Eye drops containing the active ingredient sodium cromoglycate (a mast cell stabiliser) are the most widely used and have been shown to be extremely safe and can be bought OTC.<sup>9</sup>

#### Over the counter products

- Sodium cromoglycate eyedrops
- Antazoline with xylometazoline eye drops

#### OTC restrictions

Sodium cromoglycate is not suitable for children < 6 years.<sup>9</sup>

Antazoline with xylometazoline < 12 years of age)<sup>9a</sup>

## Bacterial conjunctivitis

### Patient information on NHS Choices [\(link\)](#)

Antibiotics aren't usually prescribed for infective conjunctivitis because it usually clears up by itself and there's a very low risk of complications for untreated conjunctivitis.

However, if the infection is particularly severe or it has lasted for more than two weeks, you may be prescribed antibiotics.

Chloramphenicol is usually the first choice of antibiotic and comes in the form of eye drops. It's available without a prescription from pharmacies to treat bacterial conjunctivitis. P medicine is unlicensed in infants < 2 years old

### When to see a GP

It's very important to go back to your GP if you still have symptoms after two weeks. You should also contact your GP immediately if you experience any of the following symptoms:

- eye pain
- sensitivity to light (photophobia)
- loss of vision
- intense redness in one eye or both eyes
- blurred vision not relieved by blinking
- pain in the eye rather than gritty feeling on the eye

### Over the counter products

- Chloramphenicol 0.5% eye drops
- Chloramphenicol 1% eye ointment

### OTC restrictions

Chloramphenicol cannot be sold OTC for

- Children under 2 years.
- Pregnant and breast feeding women. <sup>10</sup>



## Cough

### Patient information on NHS Choices [\(link\)](#)

Most coughs go away on their own within 3 weeks. There's usually no need to see a doctor.

To help with your cough you can:

- rest
- drink plenty of fluids
- drink hot lemon with honey (not suitable for babies)

Hot lemon with honey has a similar effect as cough medicines.

You can use cough medicines like syrups and lozenges to help you cough less. However, they won't get rid of the cough. It will get better naturally, without treatment.

### When to see a GP

- cough for more than 3 weeks (persistent cough)
- cough is very bad or quickly gets worse, for example you have a hacking cough or can't stop coughing
- chest pain
- losing weight for no reason
- side of the neck feels swollen and painful (swollen lymph nodes)
- difficulty in breathing

See a GP urgently if patient is coughing up blood.

### Over the counter products

• OTC preparations for cough below are considered to be of low clinical priority but patients may wish to purchase [\(link\)](#)

- Pholcodine linctus
- Pseudoephedrine
- Simple linctus
- Hot lemon with honey has a similar effect as cough medicines.

### OTC restrictions

Pseudoephedrine <sup>11</sup> and pholcodine <sup>12</sup> cannot be sold OTC to:

Children under 6 years

Children 6–12 years for more than 5 days

Pseudoephedrine cannot be sold OTC to pregnant women. <sup>11</sup>

## Cystitis in women

### Patient information on NHS Choices [\(link\)](#)

Cystitis is inflammation of the bladder, usually caused by a bladder infection.

It's a common type of urinary tract infection (UTI), particularly in women, and is usually more of a nuisance than a cause for serious concern. Mild cases will often get better by themselves within a few days.

Women don't necessarily need to see their GP if they have cystitis, as mild cases often get better without treatment. You can try the self-help measures listed below, or ask your pharmacist for advice.

### When to see a GP

- you're not sure whether you have cystitis
- your symptoms don't start to improve within a few days
- you get cystitis frequently
- you have severe symptoms, such as blood in your urine, a fever or pain in your side
- you're pregnant and have symptoms of cystitis
- you're a man and have symptoms of cystitis
- your child has symptoms of cystitis

Your GP should be able to diagnose cystitis by asking about your symptoms. They may test a sample of your urine for bacteria to help confirm the diagnosis.

### Over the counter products

- Ibuprofen 200mg and 400mg tablets
- Paracetamol 500mg tablets

### OTC restrictions

- Only paracetamol can be sold OTC for pregnant women.<sup>6</sup>
- Only paracetamol or ibuprofen can be sold OTC for breast feeding women.<sup>6,7</sup>
- **Quantity** restriction of 32 tablets for paracetamol unless approved by the pharmacist (96)

## Dandruff (but not psoriasis)

### Patient information on NHS Choices [\(link\)](#)

Dandruff is a common skin condition that causes white or grey flakes of skin to appear on the scalp and in the hair.

The main treatment for dandruff is anti-dandruff shampoo. There are a number of types available to buy from supermarkets or pharmacies.

Try these shampoos for a month to see if your dandruff improves. You might need to try more than one type to find one that works for you.

You may be able to use the shampoo less often once your symptoms improve, but your dandruff will probably come back if you stop using it completely.

### When to see your GP

You don't usually need to see your GP if you have dandruff, but it's a good idea to visit them if:

- you've tried anti-dandruff shampoos for at least a month and your symptoms haven't improved
- your dandruff is very severe or your scalp is very itchy
- your scalp is red or swollen
- you have a weakened immune system – for example, you're having chemotherapy, you have HIV, or you're taking medication that suppresses your immune system.

### Over the counter products

- salicylic acid
- selenium
- ketoconazole
- coal tar

Some preparations contain several ingredients at different strength.

### OTC restrictions

The pharmacist can advise on the suitability of different preparations for each individual according to age , or if pregnant or breast feeding

Note selenium and coal tar preparations cannot be sold OTC for pregnant and breast feeding women.<sup>13,14</sup>

## Acute diarrhoea in adults and children 13 years and above

### Patient information on NHS Choices [\(link\)](#)

Most cases of diarrhoea clear up after a few days without treatment, and you may not need to see your GP. However, diarrhoea can lead to dehydration, so you should drink plenty of fluids – frequent small sips of water – until it passes.

Your GP or pharmacist may suggest using an oral rehydration solution (ORS) to prevent dehydration if you're at risk – for example, if you're frail or elderly. ORS can also be used to treat dehydration that has already occurred.

Rehydration solutions usually come in sachets available from your local pharmacist without a prescription.

### Contact your GP if you have diarrhoea and:

- there's blood in your poo
- you're vomiting persistently
- you've lost a lot of weight
- you've passed a large amount of very watery diarrhoea
- it occurs at night and is disturbing your sleep
- you've recently taken antibiotics or been treated in hospital
- you have symptoms of dehydration such as thirst and dark-coloured urine. Other symptoms may include dizziness or light-headedness, headache, tiredness, dry mouth, lips and eyes, loss of strength and stamina.
- passing small amounts of urine infrequently (less than three or four times a day)
- your poo is dark or black – this may be a sign of bleeding inside your stomach
- Persistent / frequent vomiting every hourly

You should also contact your GP if you have persistent diarrhoea. Most cases in adults will pass in two to four days.

#### Over the counter products

- Oral rehydration solutions e.g. Dioralyte and Electrolade
- Loperamide 2mg capsules

#### OTC restrictions

Oral rehydration solutions and loperamide cannot be sold OTC for pregnant and breastfeeding women.<sup>15,16</sup>

## Acute Diarrhoea in children up to 12 years

[Patient information on NHS Choices](#) ([link](#))

Oral rehydration sachets can be bought OTC for infants > 1 year old

### When to see further medical advice

#### Babies

Urgent medical advice should be sought for:

- Babies who have had six or more episodes of diarrhoea in the past 24 hours, or if they've vomited three times or more in the past 24 hours.
- Symptoms of dehydration A baby may be dehydrated if they have:
- a sunken soft spot (fontanelle) on their head
- few or no tears when they cry
- a dry mouth
- fewer wet nappies
- dark yellow urine
- drowsiness
- fast breathing
- cold and blotchy-looking hands and feet

#### Children

Medical advice should be sought for:

- Children who have had six or more episodes of diarrhoea in the past 24 hours
- Diarrhoea and vomiting at the same time
- Blood or watery faeces
- A severe or continuous stomach ache
- Symptoms of dehydration such as thirst and dark-coloured urine. Other symptoms may include dizziness or light-headedness, headache, tiredness, dry mouth, lips and eyes, loss of strength and stamina.

You should also contact your GP if your child has persistent diarrhoea. Most cases will pass in five to seven days.

#### Over the counter products

- Oral rehydration solutions e.g. Dioralyte and Electrolade

#### OTC restrictions

Oral rehydration sachets cannot be sold in infants <1 year old.<sup>15</sup>

## Dry skin

[Patient information on NHS Choices](#) (no link)

No information is available on NHS Choices online for dry skin.

Patients with dry skin should purchase emollients based on personal preference.

#### Over the counter products

Emollients

#### OTC restrictions

The pharmacist can advise on the suitability of different preparations for each individual LMSG guidance can be used if wanting to make a recommendation.<sup>17</sup>

### Earache (acute onset)

[Patient information on NHS Choices \(link\)](#)

Earache is a common problem, particularly in children. It can be worrying, but it's usually only caused by a minor infection and will often get better in a few days without treatment.

To treat the pain, you can use painkillers, such as paracetamol or ibuprofen, which you can buy over the counter.

You should contact your GP or local out-of-hours service, or call NHS 111 if:

- you or your child also has other symptoms, such as a high temperature (fever), vomiting, a severe sore throat, swelling around the ear, or discharge from the ear
- there's something stuck in your or your child's ear
- the earache doesn't improve within a few days

#### Over the counter products

- Ibuprofen 200mg and 400mg tablets
- Ibuprofen 100mg/5ml suspension
- Paracetamol 500mg tablets
- Paracetamol 120mg/5ml and 240mg/5ml suspension
- Sodium Chloride decongestant 0.9% nasal spray
- Acetic acid ear drops 2% are recommended in the Primary Care Antimicrobial guidance for otitis externa [\(link\)](#)

#### OTC restrictions

- Only paracetamol can be sold OTC for **pregnant women**.<sup>6</sup>
- Only paracetamol or ibuprofen can be sold OTC for **breast feeding women**.<sup>6,7</sup>
- **Infants and children**  
Ibuprofen and paracetamol cannot be sold for infants < 3 months of age.<sup>8</sup>
- Ibuprofen cannot be sold to infants 3-6 months who are <5kg.<sup>8</sup>
- Acetic acid ear drops <12 years of age.<sup>17a</sup>
- **Quantity** restriction of 32 tablets for paracetamol unless approved by the pharmacist (96)

### Earwax

[Patient information on NHS Choices \(link\)](#)

A build-up of earwax is a common problem that can often be treated using eardrops bought from a pharmacy. Don't try to remove a build-up of earwax yourself with your fingers, a cotton bud or any other object. This can damage your ear and push the wax further down.

If the earwax is only causing minor problems, you can try buying some eardrops from a pharmacy. These can help soften the earwax so that it falls out naturally.

#### When to seek further medical advice

Medical supervision recommended in children <5 years of age

If pharmacy treatment doesn't work after three to five days

#### Over the counter products

Olive oil  
Almond oil  
Arachis oil  
Sodium bicarbonate 5% ear drops

#### OTC restrictions

Some preparations may be less suitable for younger children. The pharmacist will be able to advise.

## Fever

### Patient information on NHS Choices [\(link\)](#)

As a general rule, a temperature of 38C (100.4F) or above is a fever.

Children's paracetamol and ibuprofen, which you can buy over the counter, can help to reduce a fever, but they're not always needed. If your child doesn't seem distressed, there's no need to give them medicine to lower their temperature

### When to seek urgent medical advice

- Children under 3 months old who have a temperature of 38C (100.4F) or above
- Children between 3-6 months old and has a temperature of 39C (102.2F) or above

Children with other signs of being unwell, such as persistent vomiting, refusal to feed, floppiness or drowsiness.

### Over the counter products

- Ibuprofen 200mg and 400mg tablets
- Ibuprofen 100mg/5ml suspension
- Paracetamol 500mg tablets
- Paracetamol 120mg/5ml and 240mg/5ml suspension

### OTC restrictions

- Only paracetamol can be sold OTC for **pregnant women.** <sup>6</sup>
- Only paracetamol or ibuprofen can be sold OTC for **breast feeding women.** <sup>6,7</sup>
- **Infants**  
Ibuprofen and paracetamol cannot be sold for infants < 3 months of age. <sup>8</sup>
- Ibuprofen cannot be sold to infants 3-6 months who are <5kg. <sup>8</sup>

**Quantity** restriction of 32 tablets for paracetamol unless approved by the pharmacist (96)

## Haemorrhoids

### Patient information on NHS Choices [\(link\)](#)

Haemorrhoids (piles) often clear up by themselves after a few days. However, there are many treatments that can reduce itching and discomfort.

Making simple dietary changes and not straining on the toilet are often recommended first.

Creams, ointments and suppositories, which you insert into your bottom, are available from pharmacies without a prescription. They can be used to relieve any swelling and discomfort

These medicines should only be used for five to seven days at a time. They may irritate the sensitive skin around your anus if you use them longer than this.

Any medication should be combined with the diet and self-care advice discussed above.

### When to see your GP

See your GP if you have persistent or severe symptoms of haemorrhoids. You should always get any rectal bleeding checked so your doctor can rule out more potentially serious causes

### Over the counter products

- Haemorrhoidal preparations usually contain multiple ingredients, including astringent, lubricants, antiseptic, local anaesthetic, and/or corticosteroids.
- Paracetamol may be helpful for pain (*not codeine or NSAIDs*)
- Paracetamol 500mg tablets,
- capsules, dispersible/effervescent tablets

### OTC restrictions

- Haemorrhoid preparations are generally not recommended OTC for children <18 years old or pregnant.<sup>18-19</sup> Some preparations are suitable under the recommendation of a doctor.<sup>20</sup>
- Quantity restriction of 32 tablets for paracetamol unless approved by the pharmacist (96)



## Hay fever

### Patient information on NHS Choices [\(link\)](#)

Before going to see your GP, you could visit your pharmacist and try to treat your hay fever symptoms with over-the-counter medications, such as antihistamines.

Make an appointment to see your GP if your symptoms don't improve after using antihistamines. You may need treatment with prescription medications, such as nasal steroid medication (corticosteroids).

The various treatments for hay fever are outlined below. You can also read a summary of the pros and cons of hay fever treatments, allowing you to compare your treatment options.

#### Corticosteroid nasal sprays and drops

Corticosteroids (steroids) are used to treat hay fever because they have an anti-inflammatory effect.

When pollen triggers your allergic reaction, the inside of your nose becomes inflamed. Corticosteroids can reduce the inflammation and prevent the symptoms of hay fever.

### When to see a GP

- Persistent symptoms not relieved by OTC medication.
- you have persistent hay fever that doesn't respond to antihistamines
- your main symptom is a blocked nose
- you're pregnant or breastfeeding

### Over the counter products

- Acrivastine 8mg capsules
- Cetirizine 10mg tablets and 1mg/ml oral solution
- Loratadine 10mg tablets and 5mg/5ml syrup
- Chlorphenamine 4mg tablets 2mg/5ml oral solution
- Beclomethasone 50mcg/ml nasal spray
- Fluticasone 0.05% w/w nasal spray

### OTC restrictions

Antihistamines cannot be sold OTC to **children** as follows:

Acrivastine <12 years.<sup>21</sup>

Cetirizine children < 6 years<sup>22</sup>

Loratadine children <2 years<sup>23</sup>

Chlorphenamine < 1 year<sup>24</sup>

Beclomethasone <18 years<sup>25</sup>

Fluticasone <4 years<sup>25a</sup>

**Pregnant and breast feeding women** should be treated by their GP for hay fever as these preparations cannot be sold OTC to this group.

#### Older people

Acrivastine cannot be sold OTC to adults over 65 years.<sup>21</sup>

## Headaches and migraines

### Patient information on NHS Choices [\(link\)](#)

Many people who have migraines find that over-the-counter painkillers, such as paracetamol, aspirin and ibuprofen, can help to reduce their symptoms.

Some OTC medicines contain both painkillers and anti-sickness medicines.

### When to see a GP

If ordinary painkillers aren't helping to relieve your migraine symptoms or if you have frequent or severe symptoms you should make an appointment to see your GP.

#### Over the counter products

- Ibuprofen 200mg and 400mg tablets
- Ibuprofen 100mg/5ml suspension
- Paracetamol 500mg tablets
- Paracetamol 120mg/5ml and 240mg/5ml suspension
- Paracetamol and codeine (co-codamol 8/500mg)
- Paracetamol 500mg/codeine 8mg/ buclizine 6.25mg tablets

#### OTC restrictions

Only paracetamol can be sold OTC for pregnant women. <sup>6</sup>

Only paracetamol or ibuprofen can be sold OTC for breast feeding women. <sup>6,7</sup>

Preparations containing buclizine and codeine are cannot be sold for children under 12 years. <sup>26</sup>

Quantity restriction of 32 tablets for paracetamol unless approved by the pharmacist (96)

## Head lice

### Patient information on NHS Choices [\(link\)](#)

Treatments to get rid of head lice are available to buy from pharmacies, supermarkets and online.

The main treatments are:

- Lotions and sprays (dimethicone)
- Wet combing

Everyone with head lice in your household should be treated on the same day.

### When to seek further medical advice

If a treatment doesn't work the first time, you can try it again, try a different treatment, or get advice from your school nurse, health visitor, pharmacist or GP

#### Over the counter products

- Dimeticone 4% Lotion (LLR Formulary first line)<sup>27</sup>
- Nit combs
- Malathion 0.5% Lotion

#### OTC restrictions

Malathion cannot be sold OTC for pregnant and breast feeding women. <sup>28</sup>

## Heartburn and indigestion

### Patient information on NHS Choices [\(link\)](#)

Heartburn and gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD) can often be treated with self-help measures and over-the-counter medicines.

Over-the-counter heartburn and GORD medicines are available from pharmacies without a prescription. The main types are:

- antacids – these neutralise the effects of stomach acid
- alginates – these produce a coating that protects the stomach and oesophagus (gullet) from stomach acid
- low-dose proton-pump inhibitors and H2-receptor antagonists

### When to see a GP

- keep getting indigestion
- are in bad pain
- are 55 or older
- have lost a lot of weight without meaning to
- have difficulty swallowing (dysphagia)
- keep vomiting
- have iron deficiency anaemia
- feel like you have a lump in your stomach
- have bloody vomit or poo

These symptoms can be a sign of something more serious.

### Over the counter products

#### Antacids:

Co-Magaldrox

#### Alginate raft forming suspension:

Sodium alginate with potassium bicarbonate e.g.  
*Peptac/Gaviscon*

#### H2 receptor antagonists/PPI's:

Ranitidine 75mg tablets

### OTC restrictions

#### Children

Alginate raft forming suspension cannot be sold OTC for children under 12 years. <sup>29</sup>

H2 receptor antagonists cannot be sold OTC for Children under 16 years. <sup>30</sup>

A number of antacids are available over-the-counter for pregnant and breast feeding women. Refer to NHS choices or your community pharmacist for advice.

## Insect bites and stings

### Patient information on NHS Choices [\(link\)](#)

Insect bites and stings normally improve within a few hours or days, although sometimes they can last a little longer.

Some people have a mild allergic reaction and a larger area of skin around the bite or sting becomes swollen, red and painful. This should pass within a week.

Ask your pharmacist about over-the-counter treatments that can help, such as painkillers, creams for itching and antihistamines.

### When to seek urgent medical advice

Occasionally, a severe allergic reaction can occur, causing symptoms such as breathing difficulties, dizziness and a swollen face or mouth. This requires immediate medical treatment (see below)

### Over the counter products

- Acrivastine 8mg capsules
- Cetirizine 10mg tablets and 1mg/ml oral solution
- Loratadine 10mg tablets and 5mg/5ml syrup
- Chlorphenamine 4mg tablets 2mg/5ml oral solution
- Hydrocortisone cream 1%
- Croxamiton cream or lotion 10%
- Croxamiton cream 10% hydrocortisone 0.25%
- Mepyramine 2% cream

### OTC restrictions

These medications cannot be sold OTC to children as follows:

Acrivastine <12 years <sup>21</sup>

Cetirizine children < 6 years <sup>22</sup>

Loratadine children <2 years <sup>23</sup>

Chlorphenamine < 1 year <sup>24</sup>

Hydrocortisone cream 1% <10 years <sup>32</sup>

Croxamiton <3 years <sup>32a</sup>

Croxamiton with hydrocortisone <10 years <sup>32b</sup>

Pregnant and breast feeding women should be treated by their GP for hay fever as these preparations cannot be sold OTC to this group.

Older people

Acrivastine cannot be sold OTC to adults over 65 years. <sup>21</sup>

Hydrocortisone cream 1% cannot be sold OTC for skin around the eyes, face, anogenital area or broken/infected skin. <sup>31</sup>

**Motion sickness**

**Patient information on NHS Choices** [\(link\)](#)

More severe motion sickness can be treated with medication. It's usually better to take medication for motion sickness before your journey to prevent symptoms developing.

**Hyoscine**

Hyoscine, also known as scopolamine, is widely used to treat motion sickness. It's thought to work by blocking some of the nerve signals sent from the vestibular system.

Hyoscine is available over the counter from pharmacists. To be effective, you'll need to take it before travelling. If you're going on a long journey – for example, by sea – hyoscine patches can be applied to your skin every three days.

**Antihistamines**

Antihistamines are used to treat symptoms of allergies, but can also help to control nausea and vomiting. They're less effective at treating motion sickness than hyoscine, but may cause fewer side effects.

They're usually taken as tablets one or two hours before your journey. If it's a long journey, you may need to take a dose every eight hours. Like hyoscine, some antihistamines can cause drowsiness. Your pharmacist can advise you.

**Over the counter products**

Hyoscine 150mcg and 300mcg tablets  
Antihistamines such as promethazine, cyclizine and cinnarizine.

**OTC restrictions**

Hyoscine cannot be sold OTC for:  
Children <3 years of age.  
Pregnant and breast feeding women.<sup>32</sup>

- Promethazine is not recommended in children < 5 years of age. Breastfeeding women.<sup>33</sup>
- Cyclizine tablets not licensed for use in children < 6 years of age. Pregnant and breast feeding women.<sup>34</sup>
- Cinnarizine not recommended in children < 5 years of age. Pregnant and breast feeding women (boots motion sickness).<sup>35</sup>

## Mouth ulcers

### Patient information on NHS Choices [\(link\)](#)

Mouth ulcers are painful sores that appear in the mouth. Although they're uncomfortable, they're usually harmless and most clear up by themselves within a week or two.

Mouth ulcers are common and can usually be managed at home, without seeing your dentist or GP.

You can buy several types of mouth ulcer treatment from a pharmacy such as mouthwashes, pain killers and corticosteroid lozenges. Speak to your pharmacist about the best treatment for you.

### See your GP or dentist if:

Your mouth ulcer has lasted three weeks

You keep getting mouth ulcers

Your mouth ulcer becomes more painful or red – this could be a sign of a bacterial infection, which may need treatment with antibiotics

Children under the age of 12 years

Mouth ulcers are also a possible symptom of a viral infection that mainly affects young children, called hand, foot and mouth disease. Speak to your GP or call NHS 111 if you're unsure.

## Over the counter products

- Antimicrobial mouthwashes
- Local anaesthetics are available as a mouthwash, lozenge, gel or spray.
- Hydrocortisone oral mucosal pellets
- Ibuprofen 200mg and 400mg tablets
- Ibuprofen 100mg/5ml suspension
- Paracetamol 500mg tablets
- Paracetamol 120mg/5ml and 240mg/5ml suspension

## OTC restrictions

Ask the pharmacist which antibacterial or anaesthetic preparations are suitable for children and pregnant or breast feeding women

Hydrocortisone oral mucosal pellets cannot be sold for children < 12 years.<sup>36</sup>

- Only paracetamol can be sold OTC for pregnant women
- Only paracetamol or ibuprofen can be sold OTC for breast feeding women
- Infants - Ibuprofen and paracetamol cannot be sold for infants < 3 months of age
- Ibuprofen cannot be sold to infants 3-6 months who are <5kg

Quantity restriction of 32 tablets for paracetamol unless approved by the pharmacist (96)

**Period pain**

**Patient information on NHS Choices [\(link\)](#)**

In most cases period pain is mild enough to treat at home.

You can take ibuprofen and aspirin to help manage your pain. However, don't take ibuprofen or aspirin if you have asthma or stomach, kidney or liver problems. Aspirin shouldn't be given to anyone under 16 years of age.

You could also try paracetamol, but studies have shown that it doesn't reduce pain as effectively as ibuprofen or aspirin.

**When to see a GP**

When ordinary painkillers are ineffective

**Over the counter products**

Ibuprofen 200mg and 400mg tablets

**OTC restrictions**

Not applicable to pregnant women.  
*Note ibuprofen can be sold OTC for breast feeding women.*<sup>7</sup>

## Sore throats

### Patient information on NHS Choices [\(link\)](#)

Sore throats are very common and usually nothing to worry about. They normally get better by themselves within a week. Your pharmacist can advise you on how to help relieve the pain and discomfort of a sore throat. with sore throats

### When to see a GP

- your sore throat doesn't improve after a week
- you often get sore throats
- you're worried about your sore throat
- you have a sore throat and a temperature of 38C or above which doesn't responsive to paracetamol
- you have a weakened immune system - for example because of HIV or chemotherapy

### When to get emergency help

- symptoms are severe or getting worse quickly
- difficulty breathing
- making a high-pitched sound as you breathe (called stridor)
- difficulty swallowing
- drooling

### Over the counter products

- Ibuprofen 200mg and 400mg tablets
- Ibuprofen 100mg/5ml suspension
- Paracetamol 500mg tablets
- Paracetamol 120mg/5ml and 240mg/5ml suspension

### OTC restrictions

- Only paracetamol can be sold OTC for pregnant women.<sup>6</sup>
- Only paracetamol or ibuprofen can be sold OTC for breast feeding women.<sup>6-7</sup>
- Infants  
Ibuprofen and paracetamol cannot be sold for infants < 3 months of age.<sup>6-7</sup>
- Ibuprofen cannot be sold to infants 3-6 months who are <5kg.<sup>7</sup>

Quantity restriction of 32 tablets for paracetamol unless approved by the pharmacist (96)



## Sprain and strains

### Patient information on NHS Choices [\(link\)](#)

Most sprains and strains can be managed at home using over-the-counter painkillers to ease any pain.

#### Treating pain

Paracetamol is usually recommended for painful sprains or strains. If it doesn't help, you may need an additional stronger painkiller – such as codeine – that's only available on prescription.

Oral NSAIDs, such as ibuprofen tablets, can also help reduce swelling and inflammation. However, they shouldn't be used in the first 48 hours after the injury because they may delay healing.

#### When to seek medical help (minor injuries unit or GP)

- Severe pain
- Can't move the injured joint or muscle
- Can't put any weight on the injured limb or it gives way when you try to use it
- Injured area looks crooked or has unusual lumps or bumps (other than swelling)
- Presence of numbness, discolouration or coldness in any part of the injured area
- Symptoms haven't started to improve within a few days of self-treatment

#### Over the counter products

- Ibuprofen 200mg and 400mg tablets
- Ibuprofen 100mg/5ml suspension
- Paracetamol 500mg tablets
- Paracetamol 120mg/5ml and 240mg/5ml suspension
- Paracetamol and codeine (co-codamol 8/500mg).
  - Ibuprofen 5% Gel/cream
  - Ibuprofen 10% Gel/Cream

Note : rubefacients are considered to be of low clinical priority but patients may wish to purchase [\(link\)](#)

#### OTC restrictions

- Only paracetamol can be sold OTC for pregnant women.<sup>6</sup>
- Only paracetamol or ibuprofen can be sold OTC for breast feeding women.<sup>6-7</sup>
- Infants  
Ibuprofen and paracetamol cannot be sold for infants < 3 months of age.<sup>6-7</sup>
- Ibuprofen cannot be sold to infants 3-6 months who are <5kg.<sup>7</sup>
- Quantity restriction of 32 tablets for preparations containing paracetamol unless approved by the pharmacist (96)

Preparations containing **codeine** are cannot be sold for children under 12 years.<sup>8</sup>

**Topical ibuprofen** can be used for up to 14 days at any one time under pharmacy supervision.

It cannot be sold OTC for patients <14 years of age or pregnant and breast feeding women.<sup>37-38</sup>

### Preventing sunburn

[Patient information on NHS Choices \(link\)](#)

#### Sunscreen

When buying sunscreen, make sure it's suitable for your skin and blocks both ultraviolet A (UVA) and ultraviolet B (UVB) radiation.

#### Over the counter products

All sunscreens can be bought OTC  
Recommended sunscreens have the letters "UVA" in a circle logo and at least four-star UVA protection

A sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15 to protect against UVB

#### OTC restrictions

No restrictions apply. However sun tan creams may be prescribed on FP10 within ACBS criteria in the following circumstances: protection against ultraviolet radiation in abnormal cutaneous photosensitivity, result from genetic disorders or photo-dermatoses, including vitiligo and those resulting from radiotherapy; chronic or recurrent herpes simplex labialis.

### Thread worm

[Patient information on NHS Choices \(link\)](#)

If you think you or your child may have threadworms, you can usually treat the infection yourself with medication available at pharmacies without a prescription.

#### When to see your GP

You only need to see your GP if you think you have threadworms and you're pregnant or breastfeeding, or if you think your child has threadworms and they're under two years old. In these circumstances, the recommended treatment is usually different.

#### Over the counter products

- Mebendazole 100mg tablets and chewable tablets
- Mebendazole 100mg/5ml oral suspension

#### OTC restrictions

Mebendazole cannot be sold OTC for children < 2 years and pregnant and breastfeeding women.<sup>39</sup>

## Vaginal thrush ([link](#))

Vaginal thrush is treated with medications you can buy over the counter from a pharmacy, or get on prescription from your GP.

Clotrimazole pessaries are available over-the-counter and are usually used daily for one to six days. Intravaginal cream is normally used once. Possible side effects include a mild burning sensation, slight redness or itching.

### What to do if you have vaginal thrush

If you've had thrush before and think you have it again, you can normally treat it with medicines bought from a local pharmacy.

It's a good idea to get medical advice from your GP or a sexual health clinic if:

- you have thrush for the first time
- you're under the age of 16 or over 60
- you're pregnant or breastfeeding – read more about thrush in pregnancy
- you have unusual symptoms, such as coloured or smelly discharge, or sores on the skin around your vagina
- you have abnormal vaginal bleeding or pain in your lower tummy
- you've had two episodes of thrush within the last six months
- you've reacted badly to antifungal treatment in the past, or it didn't work
- you or your partner have previously had a sexually transmitted infection (STI) and you think it might have returned
- your symptoms don't improve after 7-14 days of treatment

### **Over the counter products**

- Clotrimazole 1%, 2% Cream
- Clotrimazole 500mg pessary
- Clotrimazole 10% intravaginal cream
- Fluconazole 150mg capsules

These are sold separately and also as combined preparations.

### **OTC restrictions**

Treatments for vaginal thrush cannot be sold OTC to:

Children < 16 years

Adults > 60 years

Pregnant or breastfeeding women <sup>40-43</sup>

**Warts (non-facial) and verrucas** ([link](#))

Most warts and verrucas will eventually clear up without treatment.

They can be removed with over-the-counter treatments, but these can be time consuming, painful and don't always work.

Pharmacy treatments include:

- creams, gels, skin paints and medicated plasters containing salicylic acid – these burn the top layer of affected skin
- cold sprays containing dimethyl ether propane – these freeze the wart, but they're not thought to work as well as salicylic acid.

**See your GP for advice if:**

- you're not sure whether a lump is a wart – your GP can usually identify a wart by looking at it
- pharmacy treatments haven't worked
- you have a wart on your face – don't treat these yourself
- you have lots of warts or get warts frequently
- a wart bleeds, changes in appearance, spreads or causes significant pain, distress or embarrassment

**Over the counter products**

- creams, gels, skin paints and medicated plasters containing salicylic acid – these burn the top layer of affected skin
- cold sprays containing dimethyl ether propane – these freeze the wart, but they're not thought to work as well as salicylic acid.

**OTC restrictions**

Ask the pharmacist which is the most suitable preparation.

Cold sprays containing dimethyl ether propane <sup>44</sup> cannot be sold OTC for:

- Warts and verrucae bigger than 7.5mm
- Children < 4 years of age
- Diabetics
- Pregnant or breast feeding women

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## Appendix B

### REFERRAL TO LOCAL PHARMACY - NO PRESCRIPTION REQUIRED

You have a common condition that can be treated with a medication that is available to buy over the counter from your local pharmacy.

You do not need to make an appointment to speak to the pharmacist, just pop in anytime and they will be happy to help you.

Ask the pharmacist for help and advice on the most appropriate medication to relieve your symptoms for:

coughs and colds/flu	aches and pains/ back ache
sore throat	teething
hayfever and allergies	allergic conjunctiviis
skin rashes	travel sickness
heartburn and indigestion	threadworm
fever (high temperature)	head lice
diarrhoea	acne
constipation	athlete's foot
colic	cold sores
piles (haemorrhoids)	athlete's foot
headache and migraine	vaginal thrush
cystitis (women)	Bacterial conjunctivitis
eczema	<b>Other</b> - please indicate below
OTC treatment recommendation (optional)	

**If at any time you are concerned about your condition or if your symptoms are not improving after a few days of treatment with the over the counter medications you should contact the local pharmacist or the surgery for more advice.**

For more information visit [NHS choices on line](#)