

Treat Yourself

**A self-care guide
for minor illness**





This self-care guide for minor illness includes:

- A guide to what to keep in your medicine cabinet.
- Information about minor illnesses.
- A self-help directory with contact details of local NHS services and a comprehensive list of national help lines.

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Medicine Cabinet

Even a minor illness or ailment – such as colds, headaches and diarrhoea can disrupt your life. Be prepared for most common ailments by keeping a well stocked medicine cabinet at home.

This list is not exhaustive, but it will help you deal with most minor ailments.

Always follow the directions on medicine packets and information leaflets, and never exceed the stated dose.

If you have further questions about any of these medicines or you want to buy them, ask your local pharmacist.

Always keep medicines out of the sight and reach of children. A high and lockable cupboard in a cool, dry place is ideal.

Regularly check the expiry dates. If a medicine is past its use-by date, don't use it or throw it away. Take it to your pharmacy, where it can be disposed of safely.

What to have in your medicine cabinet

- Paracetamol or aspirin for adults and teenagers for headaches, colds, fever (temperatures), sore throats and pain relief.

Do not give aspirin to children under 16 years old.

- Paracetamol syrups (e.g. Calpol, Disprol, etc.) for pain or fever in children.

See the label for the correct dose for the age of child.

- Ibuprofen for adults: before purchase please check with the pharmacy.

This medication is also useful for pain relief especially if there is inflammation and can be taken alongside paracetamol for pain relief (but only 3 not 4 times a day). Ibuprofen syrup is available for children.

- An indigestion remedy.

- Menthol crystals add to hot water according to the instructions and inhale the steam to treat catarrh and dry, painful coughs or sinusitis. This is not suitable for children use a steam-filled bathroom instead.

- Antihistamine tablets for adults and syrup for children are useful for insect bites, hay fever symptoms and rashes.

- Antiseptic solution one teaspoonful mixed with warm water for cleaning cuts and grazes.

- Rehydration mixture (e.g. Dioralyte) for use in cases of diarrhoea or vomiting.

- Plasters a mixture of sizes.

- An elastic bandage and dressings to support sprains or bruises.

- Basic dressing pack.

- A thermometer for taking temperatures.

All these are useful medicines and dressings to keep at home in readiness for minor illnesses or accidents. Ask your pharmacy for advice on other remedies or medicines which may be of use at home. Keep them up to date and out of the reach of children.

A-Z of minor illnesses

Back pain

Back pain is very common and is usually caused by a spasm or cramping of muscles. Back pain can be treated with painkillers or anti-inflammatory medication which can be purchased over the counter from a pharmacy.

Both Paracetamol and Ibuprofen are useful. Heat from a hot water bottle can help and it is best to keep moving.

If the pain goes down your legs, lasts for more than a week or is associated with numbness, weakness or a bladder problem then contact the surgery for advice.

Burns and scalds

Apply large quantities of cold water to the affected area as soon as possible and maintain this until the pain reduces, this may take as long as 15 minutes or more. If the skin is unbroken but blistered, apply a loose, clean dry dressing. You may require pain relief such as Paracetamol. If the burn covers a large area or the skin is broken, consult your surgery.

Colds and runny noses

Colds are caused by viruses. There are no medicines against these viruses and antibiotics are NOT given as these are not effective against viruses.

The treatment for colds is to treat the symptoms. You can do this by taking plenty of drinks and if you have a headache or are feverish take Paracetamol or Ibuprofen.

The pharmacist will be able to help advise about decongestants and other useful medication.

Constipation

This is when you have bowel movements less often than is usual for you, often with hard stools and stomach pains. To help this you should eat more fibre in your diet (fruit, vegetables, wholemeal foods) and drink more fluids. Various laxatives can be bought from the pharmacy.

Cough

Most coughs are caused by viral infections, and often occur with colds and flu. Cough medicines may help; take Paracetamol.

Seek medical attention if the cough persists for longer than three weeks, or if you are feeling particularly unwell with a high fever or breathlessness or are producing a lot of discoloured phlegm or blood.

Cystitis

This is a common problem caused by inflammation or infection in the bladder. The symptoms are a feeling of needing to pass urine frequently and urgently with pain or a burning sensation. Symptoms will often settle by drinking lots of water and taking Paracetamol. If you are pregnant, male or a child, or for women whose symptoms do not settle within two days you should consult the pharmacist or see your doctor.

Diarrhoea and vomiting

Most episodes of diarrhoea and vomiting are caused by viruses. It is important to take plenty of clear fluids to avoid dehydration. It is usually better to avoid antidiarrhoeal medicines. If vomiting persists for

longer than 48 hours, or diarrhoea persists for more than a week, then contact your surgery.

In children contact the surgery sooner if there is a possibility of dehydration. Most people get better without the need for treatment.

Oral rehydration salts can be useful. Stick to easily digested foods such as toast, crackers, bananas and rice until you feel better. Avoid caffeine, spices and fatty foods.

Earache

This can be caused by dry skin in the ear or earwax. Earache that persists may be caused by a virus infection and Paracetamol or/and Ibuprofen is usually all that is required. Contact the surgery if symptoms persist for more than four days.

Earache is common in children. It could be caused by a bacterial infection especially if they have a fever. You could contact your surgery for further advice if there is discharge from the ear or severe pain.

If you have a temperature of 38° or you have dizziness, headache or swelling around the ear contact your GP surgery.

Eyes

Small pieces of grit or dirt in the eye should be washed out with plenty of water. If the irritation persists then you will need to contact your GP surgery for advice. Sticky eyes in children can be helped by removing any discharge with cotton wool soaked in warm water.

Mild eye infections in adults can be treated by using Chloramphenicol eye drops bought over the counter, the pharmacist is able to advise on these as well as other eye drops for sore or irritated eyes.

Hay fever

This is caused by an allergy to pollen affecting people mostly during the Spring and Summer. The symptoms are sneezing, runny nose and itchy watering eyes. Antihistamines are the main treatment. Additionally, nasal sprays and eye drops that relieve the symptoms can also be purchased from the pharmacy.

Head lice

Chemical applications are not advised, just apply ordinary hair conditioner and comb the hair thoroughly with a special fine comb which can be obtained from a pharmacy. This should be carried out daily for two weeks.

Haemorrhoids

These are swellings around the anus which can be sore, irritable and can bleed, often caused by being constipated. Constipation can be treated as stated on page 6.

You can buy creams which ease the irritation and discomfort. If you have unexplained bleeding or a recent change in your bowel habit then you should consult your doctor for advice.

Headache

The most common causes of headache are tension or migraine. Headaches also occur with illnesses like colds and flu. Tension headaches often feel like a tight band around the forehead.

Migraines come in attacks usually with visual disturbance, bad headache on one side and sometimes nausea and vomiting, and can be treated with medicines which are taken at the start of an attack. Simple pain killers, such as Paracetamol or Ibuprofen, drinking plenty of water, getting enough rest and avoiding alcohol and smoking will help most headaches.

Heart burn

Bringing up stomach acid can give a burning feeling in the upper part of the stomach and the throat. This can be helped by eating small amounts more often and avoiding hot spicy food, coffee and alcohol.

Antacid medicines can be bought from a pharmacy.

If the symptoms persist for more than a week contact the surgery for advice.

Indigestion

Indigestion, also known as dyspepsia, is pain or discomfort in your chest or stomach. This usually comes on soon after eating or drinking.

You may also have other symptoms, such as:

- feeling full or bloated
- heartburn
- nausea (feeling sick)
- belching

Indigestion is a common problem that affects many people, but in most cases it is mild and only occurs occasionally. There are many different remedies available from your pharmacist in both tablet and liquid form (e.g. Gaviscon or Rennie).

Influenza ('flu')

Influenza is also caused by a virus infection. The symptoms of flu are a high fever, muscle aches, dry cough, headache and congestion.

Symptoms may take up to two weeks to resolve, although the fever should settle within three to five days.

You need to take Paracetamol, plenty of fluids and rest.

If you are offered a 'flu' jab, take it.

Antibiotics are NOT given as these are not effective against flu.

Insect bites and stings

Antihistamines tablets and creams for bites and stings can be obtained from the pharmacy, and will usually relieve most symptoms.

Minor cuts and grazes

Wash the wound thoroughly with water or an antiseptic wipe if you have one. To stop bleeding, apply a clean dressing firmly to the wound for about five minutes. Cover with a clean dry dressing.

Nosebleeds

Nosebleeds are common, especially in children and are caused by small blood vessels in the nose bursting, usually caused by picking or with a cold (sneezing, blowing the nose). For a nosebleed, lean forward and pinch the soft part, just below the bridge of the nose, for about ten minutes. If the bleeding has not stopped then repeat the process for a further ten minutes.

If the bleeding persists for longer than 30 minutes then you should contact your surgery for advice.

Sinusitis

The sinuses are spaces inside the nose, behind the cheek bones and in the forehead. When you have a cold the lining of the sinuses swell and can block these spaces. The pressing type pain is felt in the nose or in the forehead. This feeling can be helped by using decongestant nose spray or steam inhalation. Do this by breathing steam from a bowl of steaming water with a towel over your head, drops of menthol can be added to the water.

Take Paracetamol or Ibuprofen for pain.

Sore throat

These are usually due to viruses and normally do not require antibiotics. Take Paracetamol or Ibuprofen. Plenty of fluids, throat pastilles or a throat spray may help. See a doctor only if the sore throat is severe or persists for five or more days or you are unable to swallow.

Sprains

A sprain (such as a twisted ankle) is caused by over stretching ligaments and tissues of a joint. In serious cases the ligaments can partly or completely tear. Firstly, apply a cold compress, containing ice if possible, for 15 to 30 minutes to reduce the swelling.

Elevate the foot and give the sprain plenty of rest until the discomfort has subsided. Take pain relief such as Paracetamol or Ibuprofen as needed.

See your GP if you are unable to stand on the foot, there was a lot of swelling which developed within a few minutes or you are in great pain.

Sunburn

Treat as for other burns with cold water to reduce the heat. Calamine lotion will relieve the irritation, Paracetamol will help, and drink plenty of clear fluids.

Thrush

This is an infection commonly affecting women, with an itchy discharge caused by a yeast infection. Treatment can be obtained from the pharmacy, but if this treatment fails to clear you should contact the surgery for further advice.

Toothache

Paracetamol and Ibuprofen first can be helpful, followed by stronger painkillers should the pain be severe.

Contact your dentist, not your GP.

Warts and verrucas

Creams can be obtained over the counter from the pharmacy.

Self-help directory

Local NHS

Is it an emergency?

For example:

Loss of consciousness, uncontrollable bleeding, acute confused state, persistent severe chest pain, breathing difficulties? **Dial 999** or go to your local Accident and Emergency Department.

Your nearest A&E units can be found at:

- **Nottingham University Hospitals**
Queens Medical Centre Site NG7 2UH
- **King's Mill Hospital** NG17 4JL
- **Royal Derby Hospital** DE22 3NE
- **Leicester Royal Infirmary** LE1 5WW

Your nearest Urgent Care Centres (no appointment necessary) can be found at:

- **Nottingham** NG2 4LA
7am-9pm, everyday
0115 883 8500
- **Loughborough** LE11 5JY
24 hours, everyday
01509 568 800

Information on mental health services can be found at www.nottinghamshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/letstalkwellbeing

To find your local NHS services (including dentist, GP and opticians) go to **NHS Choices** at www.nhs.uk

Out of Hours

Can't wait until your surgery opens?

Telephone your usual surgery number. Your call will be transferred to an out of hours (OOH) healthcare professional who will advise what action to take.

Or, dial **111** for the **NHS 111 service**.

Notts Help Yourself

The Notts Help Yourself website, www.nottshelpyourself.org.uk makes it easy for you to find information about a whole range of local organisations and services, including:

- Activities, groups and events in your local community
- Childcare providers
- Support for children and young people aged 0 – 25 with a special educational need and / or a disability
- Housing support and information
- Health and social care information and support for adults and children
- Information about workplace health schemes

Rushcliffe Community and Voluntary Service (CVS)

Can put you in contact with community, voluntary and support groups in Rushcliffe.

0115 969 9060

www.rushcliffecvs.org.uk

Self Help UK

Self Help UK has comprehensive, up-to-date information about local self-help groups in Nottinghamshire as well as national support organisations and international self-help contacts.

www.selfhelp.org.uk is an online, A-Z list of self-help groups.

Alternatively, call: **0115 911 1661**

Monday-Friday, 9.00am-1.00pm

Minicom: **0115 911 1655**

Stop smoking services

Smokefreelife provides free Stop Smoking Services in Nottinghamshire, either face to face or online.

Find more information at

www.smokefreelife.co.uk

or ring **0115 772 2515**.

National helplines

Carers Direct

0300 123 1053

Confidential information and advice for anyone looking after someone else.

Mind Info Line

0300 123 3393

Gives confidential advice and help for people with mental health problems.

Domestic Violence Helpline

0808 2000 247

National Domestic Violence 24-hour helpline for those who require an urgent response or need in-depth support. The helpline is run by Women's Aid and Refuge.

The Samaritans

116 123 or **0115 941 1111**

Offers a safe place to talk for those experiencing mental health issues or crisis.



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