



Self-Management of Minor Illnesses

**Hockley Farm
Medical Practice**



Introduction to minor illnesses

The NHS is under pressure in order to maintain and improve current service levels. Our surgery has seen an increase in the number of people consulting for minor self-limiting conditions. Research shows that people can cope with their symptoms in 8 out of 10 cases without the need to see your GP. We would like you to use our services appropriately to help our GPs and nurses use their time more appropriately.

With a little more knowledge and information, you may be able to diagnose and treat yourself and members of your family a lot of the time. Some basic knowledge of first aid (for example, for burns, sprains or reviving people) can help you deal with accidents. You can then decide whether something is serious enough to need medical help.

Self-care doesn't mean dealing with health problems on your own. Your GP and the practice team are there to help with any problems or situations you can't cope with. The pharmacist can give you advice on treating minor illnesses.

In this booklet you will find our recommendations on a whole range of minor illnesses and what is the best way for you to start feeling better again by managing these illnesses.

Many minor illnesses can be treated at home without ever needing to come to the surgery. Your local pharmacist

can advise about minor illnesses and using over-the-counter medication. By understanding about minor illnesses you will build your confidence in treatment for you and your family.

Generally people are more ill during the winter months but colds, tummy upsets and hayfever also occur in the summer. We understand the problem with minor illnesses is that they can make you feel quite ill and miserable. In our experience most get better without the help of your GP or nurse and usually staying in and resting is the best course of action.

Symptoms of a more severe illness include:

- A high fever that will not come down with the correct doses of paracetamol/ibuprofen
- A patient who is becoming more and more ill in themselves
- The development of a rash
- Other health problems that make it harder to fight infection
- Coughing blood, vomiting blood or passing blood.

You should visit A&E or call 999 for life-threatening emergencies, such as:

- **Loss of consciousness**
- **Persistent, severe chest pain**
- **Breathing difficulties**
- **Symptoms of a stroke - loss of speech or numbness to the face, arm or leg**
- **Severe abdominal pain**

Children - Danger signs

In children, these warning signs mean you should get medical advice immediately.

- Violet-coloured spots that don't fade when pressed
- Breathing difficulties gulping, gasping, wheezing and being unable to speak or drink
- The child seems to be in pain when breathing in
- The child is weak, drowsy or confused and doesn't react to you or its surroundings
- The child is vomiting a lot and seems ill
- The child cannot sit up or bend the head forward.

A raised temperature often occurs even with mild infections like colds and flu. Normal temperature is 37°C or 98.4°F. People usually know if they have a temperature they feel hot or cold, sweaty or shivery, and unwell. Children may be miserable and listless or look flushed. Small babies may seem very sleepy and not want to feed.

A higher temperature or fever means the body is fighting the infection. Help it along by drinking plenty of water or weak squash, keeping the room at a comfortable temperature with fresh air circulating, and sponging with cool or lukewarm water. Paracetamol or aspirin can be taken as tablets by adults and paracetamol syrup can be given to children.

Contact the emergency service immediately if the child has a temperature of over 40°C or 104°F, has a stiff neck, cramps or vomiting, or if a child seems weak and listless or suffers a fit or convulsion.

Meningitis

- Understandably parents worry about this. Fortunately, it is very rare and children are vaccinated against some strains of this illness. An average GP sees one case every 20 years
- If your child has a high fever that does not go down with treatment, has a rash or is looking very unwell and crying and distressed - please ring and speak to the duty doctor. Remember that some very sick children are very quiet and don't cry loudly.

Headaches

The most common causes of headache are tension or migraine. Headaches also occur with common illnesses like colds and influenza.

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, drinking plenty of water, getting enough rest and avoiding alcohol and smoking

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 attend the Minor Injuries Unit. Most eye infections are caused by conjunctivitis (sticky eye) in children and can be helped by removing any discharge with cotton wool soaked in warm water.

- Mild eye infections 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

Earache

Earache can be caused by eczema in the ear or earwax. In children, earache is usually caused by a virus infection and paracetamol is usually all that is required, you will only need to see a GP if the problem persists for more than 12 hours.

- Simple pain killers

Hayfever

This is caused by an allergy to pollen affecting people during the Spring and Summer. The symptoms are sneezing, blocked and/or runny nose and itchy watering eyes.

- Antihistamines are the main treatment. Can be bought from a pharmacy

- Nasal sprays and eye drops may be required and can again be brought at a pharmacy

Stomach pain diarrhoea and vomiting

Diarrhoea is usually caused by a virus and usually settles within 1-5 days. Rest the stomach by having no solid food for 12 to 24 hours and avoid spicy, sweet and fatty foods and dairy products when re-introducing food.

- Plenty of fluids and use rehydration salts (eg. Dioralyte) mixed with water
- Paracetamol if you have a fever
- Live yoghurt can help replace the "good germ" the diarrhoea washes away

Contact your GP if no improvement after 5 days, if you become dehydrated with decreased/very dark urine or feel very weak/dizzy, if you pass red or black blood.

Diarrhoea and vomiting in babies should be treated with caution and the doctor will be happy to advise you over the phone and arrange to see the child if necessary.

Back pain

Back pain causes 13 million working days to be lost in Britain each year. The spine supports the whole weight of the upper body so it is understandable that it sometimes hurts.

- If, as is usual, the pain has been caused by strain, e.g. lifting too heavy weights or twisting awkwardly, be sensible and rest for 48 hours after which try to get moving
- Take care to sit as upright as possible with a support for the small of the back.
- Take your usual painkillers as advised by the pharmacy
- If there is no improvement after 7 days and the pain does not respond to pain relief, speak to the duty doctor

Common colds, coughs and sore throats

The common cold usually starts as a viral illness and because of this unfortunately **antibiotics do not work as a treatment**. Most colds will improve after 4 to 7 days and it is well known that time is the best medicine. You may not eat a lot whilst unwell with a cold but do not worry about this.

- Take regular paracetamol for a few days as per directions on bottle/packet
- This will help with the fever and aches and pains. For children under the age of 1 year consult your local pharmacist for recommended dose of paracetamol.
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Rest as much as possible
- Coughs can last up to 3 weeks after a viral illness

Again, a sore throat does not usually need any treatment to make it go away as sore throats are mostly caused by viruses. It will usually get better by itself. To help with discomfort from a sore throat:

- Take regular paracetamol for a few days as per directions on bottle/packet
- Eat soft foods and drink plenty of fluids
- Some people believe that the colour of phlegm/snot indicates the seriousness of an infection. Research suggests this is not the case and green discharge does not necessarily require an antibiotic

Influenza (Flu)

Flu has nothing to do with common colds or sore throats. **Most people who think they have flu do not and simply have a common cold**. Flu symptoms are high fevers, uncontrollable shaking due to fever and severe muscle aches and extreme tiredness

- Treatment includes starts with regular paracetamol and fluids. Contact your GP, if you need advice

Fever

A raised temperature is natural with most illnesses and simple measures will make you more comfortable. **In small children it is important to stop the temperature rising too quickly by giving paracetamol syrup** (check dosage). Also, keep the room cool and don't wrap the patient up and give regular cool drinks. If your child is ill then please speak to your GP. You will not make them worse by bringing them to the surgery in the pram or car. Sometimes the fresh air makes feverish children feel better.

Burns

Immediately cool down the affected area with lots of cold water and continue to do this for at least 10 minutes. If the burn is superficial and clean then a simple dressing from the pharmacy will be adequate. If the burn is deep, heavily blistered and very painful, or if the skin has turned white or black, go to the nearest Accident and Emergency (Casualty) department immediately.

Cuts

Try to stop the bleeding from a minor cut by pressing it with clean hands for a few minutes; hold a cut arm or leg up high. If a cut bleeds freely any germs will normally be washed away by the blood. If it is a deep cut and the edges cannot be pulled together go to the Accident and Emergency department. Redness or swelling can be a sign of infection in a cut or graze and you should make an appointment to have it seen at the surgery. You may be advised to have a tetanus injection if you haven't had one for 10 years.

Sprains - Remember I-C-E

- **I** stands for ice. Immediately pack the sprained area with ice or a bag of frozen peas, wrapped in a cloth, to reduce swelling and speed up the healing process. Keep this on for about 20 minutes.

- **C** means compression. Bind the injured area with an elastic bandage, so it is well supported, but not so tight that it restricts the flow of blood. Retighten a few times a day.
- **E** means elevation. Rest the sprained area and keep it held high. For example, if you have a sprained ankle, rest it on a stool that is higher than the chair you are sitting on.

Head injuries

For a minor knock or bump, put on a cold damp cloth. A person should be taken to Accident & Emergency without delay if they have any of the following symptoms: vomiting, unconsciousness, double vision, drowsiness or confusion.

Choking

Stand behind the person and hug them firmly above the waist, pushing your fist up under their ribs to make them cough up the blockage. For a young child, hold the child upside down and thump on the back.

First Aid - The recovery position

This is a position in which to place a person who is unconscious. Turn the person on to their side, with the head turned to one side. Then bring the top leg over so that it is resting on the ground. This will prevent the person from vomiting and choking.

Important note: For more detailed information on resuscitation and first aid you should refer to the latest edition of The Voluntary Aid Societies' First Aid Manual (published jointly by St John Ambulance, the British Red Cross and St Andrew's Ambulance Association). This manual contains the new Resuscitation Council guidelines.

Cystitis

This is a common problem which mostly affects women, 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:

- Maintaining a good fluid intake and taking paracetamol
- Don't have sex until your cystitis has cleared up because having sex can make it worse

Nose Bleeds

Sit in a chair, bend forward slightly and squeeze the nose firmly below the bone for 10 minutes. If symptoms recur, consult the pharmacist.

Sunburn

Avoid Exposure to sun and use a good sunscreen with a high protection factor, especially for children. Otherwise treat as burns and drink plenty of fluids.

Head Lice and Worms

Both of these problems are easily dealt with by treatment available from the chemist.

Insect Bites and Stings

- Wasps - Apply vinegar to neutralize the sting as soon as possible
- Bees - Scrape away the sting and apply a little Bicarbonate of Soda solution as soon as possible
- Generally - keep Antihistamine tablets in the house to use when necessary (particularly if travelling abroad) to relieve irritation and soreness
- Insect repellents can help as well as covering up limbs with light clothing

Changing your lifestyle

The way we live can affect our health. Lifestyle changes such as giving up smoking, cutting down on heavy drinking, learning to relax or reducing our intake of fatty foods can have a big impact on our health. The practice nurse would be happy to give advice on changing your diet or other lifestyle changes. The services of a smoking counsellor is also available.

Medical certificates for employers

For the first 7 days of absence from work due to illness, you should complete a self-certificate. Your employer should supply you with the form but we also have them available at reception.

Remember!

- Your local pharmacist is a great source of help and advice as are websites like www.nhs.direct.nhs.uk or the NHS Direct Helpline which you can access by dialling **111**
- Most illnesses get better with time and self treatment but colds can last for 2 weeks
- Make sure you have a good supply of paracetamol/ibuprofen in your Family Medicine Box
- If you need further help, speak to the reception team before making an appointment - 0116 2226100

+ FAMILY MEDICINE BOX

Keep the following medicines at home in the event that you or your family develops a minor illness. Purchase from a local supermarket or pharmacy.

- + Paracetamol: tablets and/ or liquid (e.g. calpol) for relief of fever and pain
- + Soluble aspirin: for adults and children older than 16 years for relief of pain. It can also be used for gargling to treat sore throats.
- + Vapour Rub: (e.g. Vick) for blocked sinuses and catarrh and useful for children with blocked noses or dry coughs.
- + Rehydration salts: (e.g. Dioralyte)
- + Antiseptic cream: for spots, sores and grazes.
- + Antiseptic solutions: (e.g. TCP) diluted as directed, for cleaning wounds and grazes, mouth ulcers and sore throats.
- + Antihistamine: These can be used for hay fever, allergic rashes and itching.
- + Thermometer (electronic): normal body temperature is 37 degrees centigrade/celsius.

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