

Prescribing of over the counter medicines

Your GP, nurse or pharmacist will not generally give you a prescription for over the counter medicines for a range of minor health concerns.

Instead, over the counter medicines are available to buy in a pharmacy or supermarket in your local community.

The team of health professionals at your local pharmacy can offer help and clinical advice to manage minor health concerns and if your symptoms suggest it's more serious, they'll ensure you get the care you need.

Please help the NHS to use resources sensibly.

Your GP, nurse or pharmacist will not generally give you a prescription for certain medicines that are available to buy in a pharmacy or supermarket, even if you qualify for free prescriptions.

This applies to treatments for these conditions:

Acute sore throat	Conjunctivitis	Coughs, colds and nasal congestion
Cradle cap	Dandruff	Diarrhoea (adults)
Dry eyes / sore tired eyes	Earwax	Excessive sweating
Haemorrhoids	Head lice	Indigestion and heartburn
Infant colic	Infrequent cold sores of the lip	Infrequent constipation
Infrequent migraine	Insect bites and stings	Mild acne
Minor burns and scalds	Mild cystitis	Mild dry skin
Mild irritant dermatitis	Mild to moderate hay fever	Minor pain, discomfort and fever (e.g. aches and sprains, headache, period pain, back pain)
Mouth ulcers	Nappy rash	
Oral thrush	Prevention of tooth decay	Ringworm / athletes foot
Sunburn	Sun protection	Teething / mild toothache
Threadworms	Travel sickness	Warts and verrucae

GPs, nurses or pharmacists will also generally no longer prescribe probiotics and some vitamins and minerals. You can get these from eating a healthy, varied and balanced diet, or buy them at your pharmacy or supermarket.

Why does the NHS need to reduce prescriptions for over the counter medicines?


The NHS has been spending around £136 million a year on prescriptions for medicines that can be bought from a pharmacy or supermarket, such as paracetamol. By reducing the amount the NHS spends on over the counter medicines, we can give priority to treatments for people with more serious conditions, such as cancer, diabetes and mental health problems.

Exceptions to the new prescription rules

You may still be prescribed a medicine for a condition on the list if:

- You need treatment for a long-term condition, e.g. regular pain relief for chronic arthritis or inflammatory bowel disease.
- You need treatment for more complex forms of minor illnesses, e.g. migraines that are very bad and where over the counter medicines do not work.
- You need an over the counter medicine to treat a side effect of a prescription medicine or symptom of another illness, e.g. constipation when taking certain painkillers.
- The medicine has a licence which doesn't allow the product to be sold over the counter to certain groups of patients. This could include babies, children or women who are pregnant or breast-feeding.
- The person prescribing thinks that a patient cannot treat themselves, for example because of mental health problems or severe social vulnerability.

**The reasons vary for each condition.
Your GP, nurse or pharmacist will speak
to you if this affects you.**



How your local pharmacy team can help you

Your local pharmacy team are qualified healthcare professionals with the knowledge and skills to help with many health concerns. Pharmacists can give clinical advice, right there and then, and help you choose the most appropriate treatment. If your symptoms suggest it's more serious, they'll ensure you get the care you need.

What can you do?

Keeping a few useful medicines at home means you can treat common conditions immediately without needing to see a healthcare professional. **These could include:**

- Painkillers to help with pain, discomfort and fever
- Indigestion medicines, oral rehydration salts and treatments for constipation and diarrhoea
- Treatments for seasonal conditions like colds and hay fever
- Sunblock and after sun
- Basic first aid items (for example plasters or antiseptic cream)

If you have children, make sure you also have products suitable for them. Speak to your local pharmacy team about what medicines to keep at home, where to store them safely and how to use them.



What if my symptoms don't improve?

Your local pharmacy team can tell you how long to expect the symptoms of your condition to last. If they haven't improved after this time or you start to feel a lot worse, you should:

- Go back to the pharmacy for further advice
- Call NHS111
- Contact your GP

Visit the NHS website ([nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk)) and click on 'Services near you' to help you choose the right service

A&E and 999 should only be used for serious and life-threatening emergencies

Finding more information and support

- Visit the NHS website [nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk) for information and advice on treating minor health concerns
 - Find out more about this change to prescription policy at: [nhs.uk/OTCmedicines](https://www.nhs.uk/OTCmedicines)
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