

Primary care guidance for self-care medicines

People should be encouraged to self-care for minor self-limiting, short-term conditions by purchasing certain medicines and keeping a well-stocked medicine cabinet at home. Medicines required regularly for long-term conditions fall outside of this guidance. Licensing restrictions should always be considered when recommending patients to purchase items. The decision to prescribe over-the-counter (OTC) medicines sits with the individual prescriber. Please note that sales of medicines to pregnant individuals are restricted within their product license and some items will need to be prescribed.

The **NHS Community Pharmacist Consultation Service (CPCS)** in England facilitates certain patients having a same day appointment with their community pharmacist for minor illness or an urgent supply of a regular medicine, improving access to services and providing more convenient treatment closer to patients' homes.

[NHS England » NHS Community Pharmacist Consultation Service \(CPCS\) – integrating pharmacy into urgent care](#)

<u>Oral Medicines</u>	<u>Medicines Management Advice</u>	<u>Legal Sale Restrictions/ MHRA Product License Restrictions for general sale – if required for a condition outside of these license restrictions it must be prescribed (if applicable)</u>	<u>Where to purchase OTC medicines</u>
Painkillers for adults: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paracetamol • Ibuprofen • Aspirin 300mg 	Encourage patients to purchase and keep as part of a well-stocked medicine cabinet to manage short-term minor ailments: <i>e.g., minor aches/pains; earache; headache/migraine; colds; fever; toothache; sore throat; musculoskeletal pain; sprains/strains; nasal congestion; recovery post-operation; period pain.</i>	<p>Paracetamol/Aspirin/Ibuprofen: see information on subsequent column regarding where these products can be purchased.</p> <p>Naproxen: for period pain (dysmenorrhea) in women aged 15-50. (Maximum of 3 days treatment)</p> <p><u>Codeine-containing preparations</u> Please note small packs of the following codeine-containing products are available to purchase from pharmacies for a maximum of 3 days' treatment. Repeated requests should be referred to prescriber.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-codamol tablets (i.e., Paracetamol and Codeine) in strengths of 8/500mg or 12.8mg/500mg • Ibuprofen and codeine 200mg/12.8mg 	<p>Paracetamol 500mg tablets and Aspirin 300mg: Packs of 16 tablets can be purchased in supermarkets, and larger packs from pharmacies.</p> <p>Ibuprofen: For the 200mg strength, packs of 16 can be purchased in supermarkets and larger packs from pharmacies. The 400mg strength is also available to purchase from pharmacies.</p> <p>Codeine-containing preparations: Only available to purchase in pharmacies.</p> <p>Naproxen 250mg tablets – available from pharmacies.</p>

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Painkiller suspensions: Paracetamol (e.g., Calpol®) and Ibuprofen (e.g., Nurofen®)	Parents can buy to keep stock at home for when needed (e.g., teething, fever).	Paracetamol and Ibuprofen: Licensed post-immunisation from 2 months and for general use from 3 months.	Pharmacies and supermarkets.
Cough/Cold mixtures	No clinical evidence of benefit but can be purchased.	Cough/cold mixtures should not routinely be prescribed in primary care. The condition is self-limiting and will normally clear up on its own without the need for treatment For parents who wish to purchase cough/cold mixtures: Many remedies are unlicensed under 6 years of age. As there is no evidence of benefit, cough/cold mixtures should not be prescribed in this age group. Some products are available to purchase for patients aged older than 6 years. Information for parents available from http://child-cough.bristol.ac.uk/	Some cough and cold mixtures can be purchased in supermarkets. Others can only be bought in a pharmacy.
Anti-diarrhoea medication for adults	Can buy for acute episodes (less than 48 hours).	Can buy loperamide for patients aged over 12 years old (up to maximum of 12mg/day). Oral rehydration sachets or electrolyte tablets can be purchased.	Loperamide: Supermarkets or pharmacies. Oral rehydration sachets/electrolyte tablets: Supermarkets or pharmacies.
Laxatives for Adults	Infrequent constipation can be effectively managed with a change in diet or lifestyle. If these changes aren't working, an over-the-counter laxative may be suggested at the pharmacy. Most laxatives work within 3 days. They should only be used for a short time only .	Laxatives can be purchased for non-complicated, acute episodes of constipation. Stimulant laxatives on general sale will be recommended for use only in people 18 years or older. Stimulant laxatives should no longer be used in children under 12 years without advice from a prescriber, while products for children aged 12 to 17 years can be supplied under the supervision of a pharmacist. See BNSSG Gut Health leaflet which can be provided to patients: https://remedy.bnssgccg.nhs.uk/adults/self-care/self-care/	Patients can buy laxatives from pharmacies, supermarkets, or local shops.

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Threadworm tablets	Can buy from the pharmacy	Mebendazole only available from pharmacies for children aged 2 years and above.	Available from pharmacies only.
Indigestion remedies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compound alginate preparations (e.g. Gaviscon® range) • Proton Pump Inhibitors (PPIs) e.g., Omeprazole, Pantoprazole. 	<u>Short term</u> use only for over-the-counter (2 to 4 weeks) before needs to be assessed.	<p>PPIs: Can only be purchased for patients aged 18 years and above</p> <p>Compound alginate preparations (and other antacids) - licensing varies; see individual products for details.</p> <p>Patients over 50 years old with symptoms for the first time will be referred to a GP.</p> <p>In pregnancy, antacids can be purchased as required but salt content should be a consideration.</p>	<p>PPIs: Can be purchased in pharmacies. Some PPIs are also available to buy in local shops and supermarkets.</p> <p>Compound alginate preparations (and other antacids) – Products can be found in supermarkets, local shops in addition to pharmacies.</p>
Anti-histamines (e.g. cetirizine, loratadine, chlorphenamine, acrivastine)	Oral antihistamines should not be prescribed for minor ailments e.g. hay fever or insect bites/stings.	<p>Chlorphenamine (e.g., Piriton®) oral solution for 1+yr</p> <p>Loratadine oral solution for 2+yr</p> <p>Cetirizine oral solution (brands vary in minimum age from between 2-6yrs).</p> <p>Acrivastine over 12 years only.</p> <p>Fexofenadine 120mg tablets (Alleuvia®) available to purchase for patients over 12 years of age – General Sales List (GSL) status.</p>	Many antihistamines can be purchased in supermarkets or local shops.
Colic treatment	<p>Colic eventually improves on its own, therefore medical treatment is not usually recommended. There isn't sufficient evidence for the effectiveness of treatments.</p> <p>If parents/guardians do wish to try colic treatments for a child, the following can be purchased OTC:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simeticone drops Examples: Infacol® or Dentinox Colic Drops® • Lactase drops e.g., Colief 	Licensed from birth.	Can be purchased in supermarkets, local shops, and pharmacies.

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Vitamins and tonics	<p>See BNSSG formulary for indications and guidelines.</p> <p>Vitamins and tonics should be purchased if outside these guidelines.</p> <p>Examples of purchase include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • low-dose vitamin D (available to buy as 400 or 1000 international units) • folic acid in pregnancy for patients where 400mcg daily is recommended. <p>See BNSSG Vitamin D guidance:</p> <p>Adults https://remedy.bnssgccg.nhs.uk/formulary-adult/local-guidelines/9-blood-and-nutrition-guidelines/</p> <p>Paediatrics https://remedy.bnssg.icb.nhs.uk/formulary-paediatric/paediatric-local-guidelines/9-blood-and-nutrition-guidelines/</p>	<p>Exclusions: Vitamin D analogues (e.g., alfacalcidol) or vitamins for treatment of a specified condition.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Folic acid in pregnancy for patients with a higher risk of neural tube defects where a higher 5mg dose is recommended – this should be prescribed (5mg strength is prescription-only): https://remedy.bnssg.icb.nhs.uk/adults/obstetrics/ 	<p>Vitamins and tonics are available to buy in health food stores, supermarkets, and pharmacies.</p>

<u>Appliances and external medicines</u>	<u>Medicines Management Advice</u>	<u>Legal Sale Restrictions/ MHRA Product License Restrictions for general sale – if required for a condition outside of these license restrictions it must be prescribed (if applicable)</u>	<u>Where to purchase OTC medicines</u>
Topical analgesics, e.g ibuprofen gel, diclofenac gel, rubefacients (e.g. Deep Heat)	Patients can purchase these products for short-term use if required. If indicated for a chronic condition these should be prescribed. If prescribing a NSAID gel for a long-term condition, please note Ibuprofen 5% gel is the preferred option on the BNSSG formulary (at time of writing, the Fenbid brand of Ibuprofen gel is most cost-effective choice). Rubefacients should not be prescribed.	Diclofenac gel – OTC treatment limited to 7 days (14 days for 12 hour gel), can only be used for 14 years and over Ibuprofen gel - most products age limit of 12 years, some 14 years.	Topical preparations can be purchased in supermarkets or pharmacies.
Fungal nail treatments	These have a low cure rate and can be purchased OTC. Various products exist.	Amorolfine-containing products may be purchased from pharmacies for the treatment of up to two nails for adults aged 18 years and above.	Pharmacies only.
Haemorrhoid treatments, e.g Anusol, Germoloids, Preparation H (available as creams/ ointments/ suppositories)	Treatments for simple haemorrhoids including astringents are available from pharmacies. Some products also contain hydrocortisone or local anaesthetics.	Hydrocortisone-containing products are restricted to adults over 18 years of age. Most treatments for haemorrhoids are only recommended for patients aged over 18 years.	Treatments can be purchased in supermarkets. Those products containing hydrocortisone can be sold in pharmacies.
Calamine Lotion; Antiseptic Creams, Plasters	These can be bought easily in supermarkets and pharmacies as part of self-care management for cuts/grazes.	Pharmacist can advise about product choice. Calamine lotion can be purchased OTC for chickenpox.	Can be purchased in a wide variety of locations, including supermarkets, local shops, in addition to pharmacies.
Anti-fungal creams/powders	These can be purchased as part of self-care management for minor fungal infections.	Exclusions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lymphoedema or history of lower limb cellulitis • Athlete's foot – treatments should not be sold for patients with diabetes 	Supermarkets and pharmacies.
Nappy rash/barrier creams	Nappy rash usually clears up after 3-7 days if recommended hygiene tips are followed. Parent/guardian can purchase as part of self-care management.		Supermarkets and pharmacies.

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Sun burn and sun protection	Patient can purchase sun protection products and moisturisers as part of self-care management.	Prescribe sunscreen products in conditions causing photosensitivity as detailed in the Drug Tariff.	Can be purchased in a wide variety of locations, including supermarkets, local shops, in addition to pharmacies.
Bites and stings	Patients can purchase painkillers, creams, and antihistamines over the counter.	<p>Topical steroids cannot be sold OTC for patients under 10 years of age, or for use on the face or ano-genital area in all ages.</p> <p>For use on the face in adults and children over 10 years of age, there is a Patient Group Direction (PGD) within BNSSG that suitably trained pharmacists can use to supply topical Hydrocortisone: https://remedy.bnssg.icb.nhs.uk/formulary-adult/patient-group-directions/community-pharmacy-minor-ailment-pgds/</p> <p>Restrictions for antihistamines noted above.</p>	<p>Many products can be purchased in supermarkets, local shops and community pharmacies.</p> <p>Products containing hydrocortisone are available from community pharmacies.</p>
Cradle cap treatment	Usually clears up without treatment within weeks to a few months. Parents can purchase as part of self-care management.		Products can be purchased in supermarkets, local shops in addition to community pharmacies.
Emollients and bath/shower products	Prescribe emollients only for long term dermatitis, eczema, and psoriasis. A prescription for treatment of dry skin should not routinely be offered in primary care as the condition is appropriate for self-care. Patients with mild dry skin can be successfully managed using over the counter products on a long-term basis. Bath additives are non-formulary.	<p>Patient can purchase as part of self-care management.</p> <p>Topical corticosteroids – lower age limit of 10 years.</p> <p>See BNSSG emollient guidance: https://remedy.bnssgccg.nhs.uk/formulary-adult/local-guidelines/13-skin-guidelines/</p>	Emollients can be bought in a wide range of locations, including supermarkets, local shops in addition to community pharmacies.

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Excessive sweating (hyperhidrosis)	Advise on lifestyle changes and purchasing over the counter high strength antiperspirants in mild to moderate cases.	Pharmacist can advise.	Can be purchased in a wide variety of locations, including supermarkets, local shops, in addition to pharmacies.
Head lice treatment	Recommend wet combing. Various products available from pharmacies.	Alcohol-based products are not recommended for patients with asthma/sensitive skin. Dimethicone licensed from 6 months.	Can be purchased in a wide variety of locations, including supermarkets, local shops, in addition to pharmacies.
Minor acne treatment	Can buy wide range of treatments.	Topical preparations and washes are available for mild acne.	Benzoyl peroxide (topical) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can be purchased in pharmacies for both adults and children. • is also available to purchase in supermarkets for patients aged over 12 years old (e.g., Acnecide® Face Gel/Acnecide® Fash Wash)
Aciclovir cream for cold sores	Self-care appropriate for infrequent cold sores of the face and lips.	Prescribe for immunocompromised patients and the terminally ill.	Aciclovir cream can be bought easily in supermarkets and pharmacies for infrequent cold sores of the face and lips only .
Warts/verrucae	Can purchase. Prescribe in sexual health/GUM and diabetes.	Sales licensed only for use on hands and feet.	Can be purchased in a wide variety of locations, including supermarkets, local shops, in addition to pharmacies.

<u>Eye, ear, nose, mouth and throat</u>	<u>Medicines Management Advice</u>	<u>Legal Sale Restrictions/ MHRA Product License Restrictions for general sale – if required for a condition outside of these license restrictions it must be prescribed (if applicable)</u>	<u>Where to purchase OTC medicines</u>
Bacterial conjunctivitis	<p>Chloramphenicol 0.5% eye drops and 1% eye ointment can be purchased for adults and children over 2 years old following a review with a community pharmacist.</p> <p>In BNSSG there is a Patient Group Direction (PGD) that can be used by suitably trained community pharmacists to provide Chloramphenicol 0.5% eye drops or 1% eye ointment to patients under 2 years of age who meet criteria for supply. https://remedy.bnssg.icb.nhs.uk/formulary-adult/patient-group-directions/community-pharmacy-minor-ailment-pgds/</p>	Patients with glaucoma should be referred to GP. Contact lens wearers should seek advice from optometrist or GP before treating.	<p>In community pharmacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For adults and children over 2 years: following a consultation and approval for sale by a pharmacist. For children aged over 30 days and under 24 months old: Supply via PGD by community pharmacist (who is authorised to use the PGD).
Dry/tired eyes	Patient can purchase eye drops as part of self-care management. Advise on good eyelid hygiene and avoiding environmental factors.	Hypromellose and other dry eye drops can easily be purchased over the counter for mild to moderate cases. Pharmacist or optician can advise.	Can be purchased in a wide variety of locations, including opticians, supermarkets, local shops, in addition to pharmacies.
Corticosteroid nasal sprays	Corticosteroid nasal sprays are available over the counter for the treatment of seasonal allergic rhinitis for up to three months.	Beclometasone 50mcg, fluticasone propionate 50mcg, mometasone 50mcg and Budesonide 64mcg available OTC for adults aged over 18 years.	Some can be purchased in supermarkets, with a greater selection from community pharmacies
Eye drops for hay fever	Eye drops available OTC contain sodium cromoglicate 2% or an antihistamine.	Different products have different restrictions.	Sodium cromoglicate eye drops can generally be purchased from supermarkets or pharmacies for use in patients over the age of 6 years.
Decongestant nasal sprays and tablets	Topical nasal decongestants (e.g., xylometazoline as nasal drops or spray) can cause rebound congestion	Topical nasal decongestants (nasal drops and sprays) Nasal sprays are available that can be sold for patients aged over 12 years for use for a maximum of 7 days.	<p>Nasal sprays</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Available from pharmacies and supermarkets for patients aged

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	<p>following prolonged use (more than 7 days). Their value is therefore limited but patients can purchase as part of self-care management.</p> <p>Systemic nasal decongestants (e.g., pseudoephedrine tablets) - patients over 12 years old can purchase.</p> <p>Products containing essential oils or medicated vapours These products typically contain menthol and/or eucalyptus alongside other ingredients. They are for inhalation or use as a chest rub.</p>	<p>Nasal drops (Otrivine® Child nasal drops) can be purchased in pharmacies for children who are 6 years and over. Otrivine® Adult nasal drops are also available to purchase in pharmacies for patients</p> <p>These topical nasal decongestant products are not to be prescribed even for those patients who fall outside OTC licensing.</p> <p>Phenylephrine and pseudoephedrine tablets can both be sold for patients over 12 years old for a maximum of 7 days (see BNF contra-indications). If long-term issues, see GP.</p> <p>Examples of products containing essential oils/medicated vapours for purchase include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Olbas® oil - licensed from 3 months old • Vicks® VapoRub - can be used by adults and children above 2 years old. 	<p>over 12 years</p> <p>Nasal drops</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Otrivine® Child nasal drops can be purchased in pharmacies for children who are 6 years and over. <p>Phenylephrine and pseudoephedrine (oral)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only can be bought in pharmacies <p>Products containing essential oils or medicated vapours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Olbas® oil and Vicks® VapoRub are available to purchase from many different outlets
Toothpaste/prevention of dental caries	<p>Higher strength fluoride toothpaste and mouthwashes can be purchased over the counter.</p> <p>When prescription is warranted, these should be prescribed by a Dentist, not by the GP practice.</p>	Refer patient to their dentist for further advice. Some high strength products (e.g., Duraphat® 2800ppm & 5000ppm) are prescription only and should only be prescribed by and under the advice of a dentist.	Can be purchased in a wide variety of locations, including supermarkets, local shops, dental surgeries, in addition to pharmacies.

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Ear wax drops	Patients can buy olive oil drops or other OTC products.	All ear wax removal products are available to buy.	Can be purchased in a wide variety of locations, including supermarkets, local shops, in addition to pharmacies.

<u>Thrush (vaginal and oral) and cystitis treatments</u>	<u>Medicines Management Advice</u>	<u>Legal Sale Restrictions/ MHRA Product License Restrictions for general sale – if required for a condition outside of these license restrictions it must be prescribed (if applicable)</u>	<u>Where to purchase OTC medicines</u>
Vaginal Thrush Treatments (e.g. fluconazole 150mg capsules, clotrimazole cream or pessaries)	Can be purchased in combination with external creams (Clotrimazole 1%/2% and 500mg pessaries)	Can be purchased from 16-60 years old who are not pregnant or breastfeeding, have been previously diagnosed with thrush and have had fewer than 2 episodes in the last 6 months. Patients aged over 60 years old or those who are pregnant must be referred to a GP. Male partners can also be treated OTC.	Can be purchased in a wide variety of locations, including supermarkets, local shops, dental surgeries, in addition to pharmacies.
Oral thrush treatment	Miconazole oral gel can be sold OTC	Must not be sold to patients taking warfarin or other coumarins due to potentially fatal interaction increasing INR Contra-indicated in infants less than 4 months of age or in those whose swallowing reflex is not yet sufficiently developed.	Can be purchased in pharmacies.
Mild cystitis	Mild cases can be defined as those that are responsive to symptomatic treatment but will also clear up on their own. Patient can be signposted to OTC treatments if clinically appropriate e.g., paracetamol, ibuprofen, Cystopurin [®] sachets, CaneOasis [®] sachets. Note: For the treatment of acute uncomplicated urinary tract infections	Patients should see their GP if red flags are present: symptoms that don't improve after 48 hours of self-care measures, frequent cystitis, severe symptoms (e.g. blood in urine, develops a fever, loin pain or pain in side), in pregnancy, children.	Paracetamol and ibuprofen can be bought in supermarkets, local shops and in pharmacies. Specific cystitis relief products e.g., Cystopurin [®] sachets (potassium citrate) or CaneOasis [®] granules (sodium citrate) are available to purchase in supermarkets, local shops, and pharmacies.

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	<p>(in non-pregnant females aged 16 to 64 years old) there are Patient Group Directions (PGDs) that can be used by suitably trained community pharmacists in BNSSG to supply Trimethoprim or Nitrofurantoin to certain patients who meet criteria.</p> <p>https://remedy.bnssg.icb.nhs.uk/formulary-adult/patient-group-directions/community-pharmacy-minor-ailment-pgds/</p>		Community pharmacies have similar non-branded products on sale.

<u>Travel sickness</u>	<u>Medicines Management Advice</u>	<u>Legal Sale Restrictions/ MHRA Product License Restrictions for general sale – if required for a condition outside of these license restrictions it must be prescribed (if applicable)</u>	<u>Where to purchase OTC medicines</u>
Travel sickness treatments	Hyoscine hydrobromide, promethazine, cinnarizine (oral) and hyoscine patches all available OTC	Different age restrictions for different products; refer to pharmacy. Minimum age generally 4-5 years (Promethazine elixir from 2 years).	Available to purchase in pharmacies.

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