

Common ailments at home and at work



**A self-care guide
by Dr Ian Banks**

Introduction

Common ailments, from rashes to colds and flu, are a part of every day life. Most common ailments do not need a prescription and you can treat them yourself, or with advice and medicines from your pharmacist. This is often the quickest and most convenient way to feel better with rapid symptom relief.

There is useful information on common ailments in this booklet and it will help you to:

- **recognise common ailments**
- **treat them whether at home or at work**
- **know what medicines to use**
- **decide where to get advice if you are still unsure.**



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Advice for Treating Common Ailments

Self-care advice

Keep a well stocked medicines cabinet at home and at work to be prepared for ailments when they strike. Check out **Medicines Chest** on page 4 for useful medicines to keep at home and at work.

Ask your pharmacist

Pharmacists are medicines experts and are usually the quickest and most convenient way to get advice and treatment about common illnesses like colds and flu or sickness and diarrhoea. You don't need an appointment and you can speak to them in confidence. If you want to speak to your pharmacist privately, away from other customers, many will have a quiet area, ask either the assistant or the pharmacist.

If you are still worried and need advice you have several choices:

NHS Direct (England and Wales only) For 24 hour health information and advice from a professional nurse who can advise you on what to do if you feel ill, give you information about particular health conditions and local services, and direct you to self-help or support organisations call NHS Direct on 0845 4647. This service is available in England and Wales only.

Walk-in Centres NHS Walk-in Centres offer easy access to healthcare advice and treatment for minor injuries and illnesses. They are open from 7am until 10pm and you do not need an appointment. This service supports local GP and hospital services. To find out if there is an NHS Walk-in Centre near you, call NHS Direct on 0845 4647 (England and Wales only).

GP surgery Make an appointment at your local GP surgery for general medical advice and treatment, prescriptions, referral to a specialist or hospital, immunisations and tests.

Accident and Emergency (999) In an emergency either go to accident and emergency or call 999. An emergency is a critical or life-threatening situation such as unconsciousness, heavy blood loss, suspected broken bones, deep wound, suspected heart attack or difficulty in breathing.

Medicines Chest

There are some symptoms that it's worth keeping medicines for at home or at work so that you are prepared for and can easily treat ailments:

- **Paracetamol, aspirin* or ibuprofen**
These are the three most common remedies for *pain*, *fever* and *headaches*. Aspirin and ibuprofen also have anti-inflammatory properties e.g. for *strains* and *sprains*.
* Do not give aspirin to children under 16 years old.
- **Paracetamol or ibuprofen syrups for children**
- **Rehydration mixture**
If you have *sickness* or *diarrhoea*
- **Indigestion remedy**
There are many remedies available to treat indigestion such as antacids for *excess acid* and remedies to treat symptoms like *heartburn*, *feeling bloated* or *trapped wind*.
- **Travel-sickness tablets**
- **Sunscreen** – SPF15 or higher
- **Sunburn treatment** (e.g. calamine lotion)
- **Tweezers and sharp scissors**
- **Thermometer**
- **Plasters, non-absorbent cotton wool, elastic bandages and dressings**
For *cuts*, *grazes* and *burns*
- **Cough medicines**
There are a wide range available, make sure you get the right kind for the type of cough you have (e.g. dry or chesty).
- **Decongestants**
Decongestants for *blocked nose*, *allergy* or *hay fever* come in tablet or spray forms by spraying or inhaling the remedy into the nose. They should be used for temporary treatment only and not for prolonged periods.
- **Antihistamines**
Antihistamines for *allergies* and *hay fever* are excellent all-round treatments and are more effective if taken before the symptoms occur – rather than after they have started. They are available in tablet form and are effective in controlling most of the typical symptoms like sneezing, runny nose, watery eyes, itchy nose and throat. Remember to read the label as some antihistamines can make you feel drowsy and you should not drive while taking them.

Basic home first aid kit

- thermometer
- plasters
- sterile dressings
- triangular bandages with instructions on how to fit
- sterile eye pads
- cotton wool
- safety pins
- tweezers
- sharp scissors
- disposable gloves
- antiseptic liquid or cream



Medicines Advice

When you are buying medicines for yourself (or others) be prepared to tell the pharmacist:

- what your symptoms are and how long you have had them
- what treatment, if any, has already been tried
- what other medicines, (including complementary medicines) either from your doctor, pharmacist or other health professional you are taking
- if you are sensitive or allergic to medicines that you know of
- any relevant medical history.



Ask about your medicines

Here are some questions that you can ask health professionals like a pharmacist or doctor to help you understand your medicines better:

- what does this medicine do?
- how long will I need to use it?
- how and when should I take it?
- should I avoid any other medicines, drinks, foods or activities when I am taking this medicine?
- what are the possible risks and side effects – and what should I do if they happen to me?

Using medicines

- Keep all medicines secure, locked in a cool dry place, and out of the sight and reach of children.
- Always read the label and patient information leaflet before taking medicines and only take the recommended dose.
- Check the expiry date – never use out-of-date-medicines, take any out-of-date medicines back to your pharmacist who can destroy them safely.
- Keep all medicines in their original containers.
- Ask your pharmacist who is able to offer you expert advice on medicine and can advise you on which medicines are best suited for treating your symptoms.
- Other medicines you are taking or conditions (e.g. pregnancy) may affect whether a medicine is suitable for you, always discuss with a health professional to make sure your medicine is appropriate.
- Ask your pharmacist for advice before giving over-the-counter medicines to children.

Essential Nutrients

Symptoms: If you feel run down, lethargic, frequently suffer from minor ailments, bad skin, lifeless hair or weak nails you may be lacking essential nutrients.

A healthy balanced diet will give your body the essential nutrients that it needs. Getting your essential nutrients will make you feel better, give you more energy and help you have healthy skin, hair and nails.

How can I get my essential nutrients?

Try to eat a healthy balanced diet that includes:

- a minimum of five portions of fruit and vegetables a day
- four to six servings of starchy foods, preferably wholegrain, such as bread, cereals, potatoes, rice and pasta
- two servings of foods providing protein such as lean meat, fish, eggs, pulses and beans
- at least half a pint of milk, preferably skimmed or semi-skimmed, or its equivalent in the form of yoghurt or cheese
- fatty and sugary foods should be kept to a minimum.

With a healthy balanced diet you should not need to take supplements. However, taking supplements can help if you find it tough to fit all you need into your regular diet. A general multi-vitamin and mineral will be sufficient for most people.



Key essential nutrients

Some key essential nutrients which many people in the UK do not get their recommended daily allowance (RDA) of include:

- **Vitamin C + A.** Vitamin C (found in citrus fruits like oranges and kiwi fruit, also peppers, broccoli and berries) is important for maintenance of a healthy immune system and Vitamin A (found in foods like liver, cheese, eggs, milk and oily fish like mackerel) is thought to also play a role in fighting infection.
- **Minerals like iron, calcium, magnesium or zinc.** At least 90% of women do not get enough iron, this can cause anaemia and make you feel generally lethargic or dizzy. These minerals can be found in food such as:
 - **Iron** – meat, liver, beans, nuts, dried fruit and wholegrains such as brown rice
 - **Calcium** – milk, cheese, bread, green vegetables like broccoli and cabbage and fish such as sardines where you eat the bones
 - **Magnesium** – bread, meat, fish, dairy foods and leafy green vegetables like spinach
 - **Zinc** – meat, shellfish, milk and dairy foods, bread and cereal products.



Where to get advice

- Pharmacists can give you information and advice on nutrition. They can also advise on supplements you may need, or you can ask your GP at your next appointment.
- Health food shops and many health clubs and gyms may also be able to offer nutritional advice.

Stress



Symptoms: fatigue, mood swings, skin problems, muscle tension, disturbed sleep patterns, low self-esteem, anxiety, poor concentration, changes in eating patterns, poor memory/ forgetfulness. People vary in how much stress they can experience before it has an effect on their health.

According to the Health and Safety Executive stress is:
“The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them. It can be caused by things at work or by things outside of work, or both.”

Stress does not necessarily lead to ill health but it can cause problems if it goes on for long periods of time or is particularly intense. Stress can have a negative effect both physically and emotionally and the way individuals respond to stress can vary hugely.

How can I treat stress signals?

- Exercise has been found to have a positive effect on the common symptoms of stress and it can be useful in helping to prevent stress related ill-health.
- Make time for yourself mentally and emotionally. Relaxation techniques or meditation can be useful for many people.
- There are many types of relaxation classes available as well as meditation, yoga, pilates etc.
- Taking a positive approach to your health can also encourage you to avoid turning to food, alcohol or other drugs such as nicotine as a comforter against the negative feelings of stress.

How can I deal with stress at work?

Lots of people feel stress at work and it can be caused by a wide variety of reasons such as feeling like you have too much or too little to do, little freedom or flexibility, lack of clarity about where you fit in the workplace, trying to balance working and home life demands and strenuous work relationships.

Your organisation has a legal responsibility to support you in finding ways to reduce the causes of work related stress. There are also a number of things you can do for yourself which may help to relieve stress:

- organise your work – if your workload and time management is a problem speak to your manager, if this is difficult you could speak to a staff representative or trade union representative
- develop a network of people who can support you
- change your work environment (e.g. list your priorities, develop a filing system)
- take regular breaks away from work at lunchtime, avoid long work hours and take proper holidays
- exercise – going to the gym, a brisk walk, running or swimming are all good ways to take your mind off things
- Find out if your company has a counselling or occupational health service and use it
- If you feel distressed at work – try and take some time-out to calm down and have a break
- Learn simple relaxation techniques that you can do at work such as deep breathing.

Where to get advice

- You may find information about relaxation classes at your local library, gym, health centre or look on the internet.
- Ask your personnel department or health and safety representative about your company policy on work related stress and who the best person for you to speak to is.
- Speak to your GP or call NHS Direct 0845 4647 (England and Wales only) for more advice.



Back Pain

Most acute back pain (pain which goes on for a limited time) is caused by muscle or ligament strain which is often a result of poor posture (both standing and sitting), bad lifting technique, lack of fitness, being overweight, over-stretching or overuse of your back muscles.

The pain is most often caused when muscles in the back are strained or go into spasm because of over-stretching or overuse. Even when there is a lot of pain it is unlikely that it is caused by anything more serious, like infection, because this is relatively rare. Most pain will lessen within two to three days.

What can I do to treat back pain?

- During the first day or so of an episode of back pain, take it easy. Try not to bend forwards and try not to strain yourself or sit in a chair for long periods of time. Take pain killers regularly such as paracetamol or ibuprofen according to the manufacturers instructions. You may wish to apply a heat or ice pack to the area, for no longer than 30 minutes at a time. **Do not apply ice packs directly to the skin (wrap it in a tea towel first).**
- If the pain lasts longer than one to two days you should begin trying to get up and about. Moving around won't do your back any harm even if it hurts – in fact you may help it get better faster by keeping as active as possible. **Lying in bed for too long will not help, it may even make it worse.**
- Carry out your normal activities, like going to work, walking your dog or shopping and cooking as best you can, but try not to overdo things.

Where to get advice

- If your back pain is due to muscle spasm you can usually manage it yourself with advice from your pharmacist or call NHS Direct 0845 4647 (England and Wales only) without having to spend time visiting your GP. In most cases your GP is likely to advise you to improve your posture and lifting technique, take pain killers such as paracetamol and may offer you exercise routines.

- You may wish to seek help and advice from someone who deals with back pain all the time, such as a physiotherapist, osteopath or chiropractor.
- If you have back pain with any of the following symptoms you should go to your GP or call NHS Direct 0845 4647 (England and Wales only) immediately:
 - feel numb or have pins and needles in one or both legs or around your back passage, genital area, or inside the tops of your thighs
 - you are incontinent (bladder or bowel) or are unable to pass water
 - you feel unsteady on your feet or both legs feel weak
 - you feel generally unwell (e.g. if you have a high temperature as well as severe back pain)
 - you have weight loss or night sweats
 - your back pain is getting worse over a period of time (more than four weeks) for no apparent reason.

Tips on correct lifting technique

Follow these four steps to lifting correctly.

1. Bend your knees
2. Keep the object close to your body
3. Keep your back straight
4. Lift by straightening your legs not your back

Reverse this for putting the object down and remember not to twist your back, instead turn with your feet.



Coughs, Colds and Flu

Symptoms: fever, aches, sore throat, runny nose, blocked nose and cough. Cold and flu symptoms are similar, however, flu symptoms are more severe and last longer.

Should I have a flu vaccination?

The NHS recommends that everyone aged 65+ should have a flu jab each year. You should also consider having a flu jab if:

- you have bronchitis, asthma, emphysema, heart disease, kidney disease or diabetes
- your immune system is weakened by disease or treatment such as HIV or chemotherapy
- you live in a nursing home, residential home or other long-stay home.

If you think you need a flu jab contact your GP surgery.



How can I treat cough, cold and flu symptoms?

- The fastest and most effective way to treat colds and flu is with advice from your pharmacist.
- Breathing in steam from a hot shower, in the bath or from a basin can help ease a blocked nose, stuffiness and a sore throat. You can also put inhalant drops, aromatic rub or salts in the water for extra relief.
- Drink plenty of fluids. Drinks like hot water with lemon juice and honey have a soothing effect. Vitamin C and zinc may also help you fight infections.
- Get plenty of rest and avoid strenuous exercise.
- If you don't feel like eating try soup instead.
- There are several remedies to treat cough, cold and flu symptoms, (see page 15 opposite) you can also ask your pharmacist for further advice.



Colds and flu are caused by viruses. Antibiotics do not work on viruses so will not cure colds and flu.

Where to get advice

- Ask your pharmacist or call NHS Direct 0845 4647 (England and Wales only) for advice.
- Check with your pharmacist which medicine is best for you. For example, if you suffer from high blood pressure many decongestants may not be suitable.
- If your cough persists for more than a fortnight, you have a lot of yellow or green phlegm, you have pain in your chest or shortness of breath ask your pharmacist or GP for advice or call NHS Direct on 0845 4647 (England and Wales only).

Use this table to help you find the right remedy for cough, cold and flu symptoms.

Symptom	Remedy
High temperature, headache, aches and pains	The three most common remedies for pain, fever and headaches are paracetamol, aspirin* or ibuprofen . Aspirin* and ibuprofen also have anti-inflammatory properties.
Cough	There are a wide range of cough medicines available. Ensure you get the right variant for your type of cough (e.g. dry or chesty).
Sore Throat	Sore throat relief comes in the form of lozenges, pastilles and sprays as well as traditional pain relief remedies such as paracetamol and aspirin* .
Runny Nose	The most common therapies for runny nose can be taken orally as a tablet or as a liquid.
Blocked Nose	There are several decongestants available beyond the traditional aromatic oil based products. Decongestants are generally taken orally as a tablet or topically by spraying or inhaling the remedy into the nose.

* Do not give aspirin to children under 16 years old.

Headaches, Fever and Hangovers

Headaches can have a whole variety of causes including hazards at work such as looking at a computer screen too long, stress, needing glasses or dehydration caused by alcohol.

How can I treat headaches & fever?

- The most common remedies for pain relief are ibuprofen, aspirin* and paracetamol. These pain relief drugs are called analgesics. In addition, these remedies will also reduce a high temperature.
- If you use a computer at work take a break regularly to avoid eye strain.
- Stress may be causing your headaches – check out **Stress** on page 9 for advice on dealing with stress.
- Cool drinks can help reduce your temperature and a damp towel on the forehead can also help.

* Do not give aspirin to children under 16 years old.

How can I treat hangovers?

- Hangover headaches are largely caused by dehydration due to alcohol and insufficient fluid. The most effective way to prevent them is by drinking plenty of water, perhaps alternating water with alcoholic drinks and by ensuring you get plenty of fluids the next day. Drinking water before you go to bed may also help.
- The recommended pain relief for the 'classic hangover' the next day is paracetamol. Other analgesics can irritate what might already be a sensitive stomach. However, you should not mix any alcohol or analgesics on the same night.
- There are paracetamol products specifically designed for hangovers, which also include electrolytes in an effervescent granule formulation which provide headache relief, rehydration and replacement of electrolytes.
- You may also feel nauseous (sick) check out **Sickness** on page 18 for advice on dealing with sickness.



Where to get advice

- Speak to your pharmacist or call NHS Direct 0845 4647 (England and Wales only) for more advice.
- It is normal to have a temperature at the beginning of a cold, flu or other viral infection. However, if it lasts longer than 48 hours seek advice from a health care professional.
- If you find yourself having difficulty seeing things at a short or long distance, this could be causing your headaches, speak to an optician about having an eye test.
- If you are suffering from a headache for more than a few days or on a frequent basis speak to your doctor or call NHS Direct 0845 4647 (England and Wales only) for more advice.
- If you are suffering from hangovers on a regular basis you could be in danger of permanently harming your health. Check this out with your GP or call NHS Direct 0845 4647 (England and Wales only).

Remember **do not** use over-the-counter medicines for headache relief for more than the recommended few days without consulting a health care professional.



Sickness (Vomiting) and Diarrhoea

Sickness (vomiting) and diarrhoea is not usually a sign of anything serious. It is generally caused by a bug, something you've eaten or just too much food or alcohol. Some people also suffer sickness while travelling.

How can I treat sickness and diarrhoea?

- There are a range of remedies you can buy from your pharmacist to help ease nausea, relieve travel sickness and in some cases relieve diarrhoea. Speak to your pharmacist for more advice.
- Do not eat solid food, drink excessive tea or coffee or take painkillers until the sickness has stopped.
- Drink water little and often, even if it does not stay down for long. Keep your fluid intake up as this will help to stop you getting dehydrated.
- Sickness and diarrhoea should stop in 24 hours and then you can start introducing foods again but try not to overload your stomach too quickly.

Where to get advice

Ask your pharmacist, doctor or call NHS Direct, 0845 4647 (England and Wales only) if:

- you are vomiting or have diarrhoea repeatedly and/or it does not settle down in 24 hours
- there is blood in your vomit or stools or dark brown/black matter in your vomit
- you have had a head injury in the preceding 24 hours and are sick
- your sickness is accompanied by a very high temperature, severe headache, abdominal, neck or back pain and/or bright light bothers you and you feel drowsy or confused
- you are on medication and regularly feeling nauseous (sick) as this may be a side-effect from your medication.

Constipation

Constipation is often caused by lack of dietary fibre, not drinking enough fluids or too little activity. Sometimes it can also be caused by medicines you are taking (e.g. codeine), hormonal changes (e.g. menopause) or stress.

How can I treat constipation?

- Make sure your diet includes plenty of wholegrain, cereals and bread (this includes foods such as pasta, rice and beans which should make up about a third of your diet) and at least five portions of fruit and vegetables.
- Drink plenty of water – around two litres a day (six to eight glasses, cups or mugs).
- A number of laxatives are available over-the-counter that will stimulate your bowel movements, ask your pharmacist for the best type to suit you.
- Keep active to encourage normal bowel activity.



Where to get advice

- Ask your pharmacist to recommend what laxative is best for you. Let your pharmacist know if you are taking other medication as this may be causing your constipation and they can advise you.
- If laxatives do not work, you have lower abdominal pain or other symptoms such as persistent vomiting, blood in your motions (poo), weight gain or loss and tiredness speak to your GP or call NHS Direct on 0845 4647 (England and Wales only).

Indigestion

Symptoms: burning pain in the chest which goes into your throat, bitter taste in the mouth, bloated or gassy stomach, general stomach discomfort, a lot of wind.

Many of us are familiar with that feeling of bloating, discomfort or even pain after we've overdone it with food or drink. This is known as indigestion. Indigestion (or dyspepsia) is any symptom or collection of symptoms caused by disruption of the body's digestive system. Some people will suffer symptoms every day and others only occasionally.

How can I treat indigestion symptoms?

- Avoid spicy, fatty and/or large meals, especially just before bedtime.
- Try to cut down on tea, coffee, fizzy drinks and alcohol.
- If you smoke, stop.
- Put an extra pillow under your head at night as it is harder for the acid to flow uphill.
- Your pharmacist can advise you on the range of indigestion remedies available to treat symptoms like heartburn, excess acid, feeling bloated or trapped wind.

Where to get advice

- Your pharmacist will be able to recommend the best medicine for your tummy trouble.
- Speak to your GP or call NHS Direct 0845 4647 (England and Wales only) if:
 - symptoms suddenly get worse, are not relieved by medication, persist longer than one week or if they come back when you stop taking your medicine
 - you are under 16 or over 45 years old
 - you have any other symptoms such as weight loss, vomiting, blood in your motions (poo) or they are very dark or black
 - you find it difficult to swallow or it feels like food sticks in your throat when you swallow
 - you are short of breath, wheezing or coughing
 - you have a severe pain in your back, throat, ear, chest or neck
 - you have ever had surgery on your stomach, a stomach ulcer, bleeding in your stomach or intestine, or you have anaemia.



Irritable Bowel Syndrome

Symptoms: abdominal pain – often on the left hand side, alternate bouts of diarrhoea and constipation, bloating, feeling nauseous (sick) and/or loss or lack of appetite. Symptoms vary greatly between people.

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a common digestive disorder and although the causes of IBS are not fully understood, research shows that the bowel of IBS sufferers is more sensitive than usual and this sensitivity sets off a reaction, causing the symptoms.

How can I treat IBS?

- The best treatment for IBS is to understand the triggers and avoid them.
- Eat a well-balanced diet, with plenty of fibre and fresh fruit and try to eat small meals at regular intervals.
- Avoid rich, fatty or spicy foods.
- Common foods such as dairy products and bread and cereals can trigger symptoms, so check out your body's reaction to these foods.
- Natural fibre supplements can be prescribed or obtained from the pharmacy to help your bowel work more effectively. Medicines are also available that help some patients, by reducing the frequency and severity of stomach cramping.

Where to get advice

- If you think you may be suffering from IBS, speak to your pharmacist or GP for advice or call NHS Direct 0845 4647 (England and Wales only).



Hay Fever and Allergies

Symptoms: blocked or itchy nose, sore, streaming and watery eyes, blocked ears, sneezing, sinus pain, tickly throat and/or itchy palate, blisters or skin rashes – check out **Rashes** on page 25 for more advice on dealing with skin rashes.

Hay fever and allergies happen when you come into contact with a substance that your body is unusually sensitive to. In the case of hay fever it is the pollen in the air, but allergies can be caused by any substance, from specific kinds of foods to animal fur and dander. These substances are called allergens which stimulate the release of histamine from cells in the skin. This causes a noticeable reaction such as swelling.

Common allergies include: pollen, house dust mite, moulds, pets, insect bites, industrial and household chemicals, some medicines and foods. Less common allergens include nuts, fruit and latex. Certain drugs such as penicillin can cause allergic reactions.

How can I avoid and treat hay fever and allergies?

- When you are suffering an allergic reaction, try to identify what causes it, and avoid coming into contact with the substance or situation in the future.



- If you get hay fever, watch out for the pollen count, which is published in many newspapers and is often on TV weather forecasts. There are many hay fever remedies that can help if taken early, but ask your pharmacist's advice if you have high blood pressure.
- Speak to your pharmacist, there are a range of remedies available to treat hay fever and allergies such as antihistamines, nasal anti-inflammatories (reduce inflammation and swelling in the nose), decongestants and eye drops.

Where to get advice

- If you experience recurring allergic symptoms, tightness of chest, wheezing or shortness of breath contact your GP or call NHS Direct 0845 4647 (England and Wales only).
- A more serious, but very rare, type of allergic reaction is anaphylaxis or anaphylactic shock. People known to be at risk must see their GP for advice and treatment and carry a pack of emergency medicines at all times.
- An organisation called MedicAlert can help to provide emergency identification for people with allergies, call 020 7833 3034 or go to www.medicalert.org.uk for more information.



Skin Problems

Your skin is the largest organ in the body and covers an average area of about 1.8 square meters, like the size of a bed sheet. Skin problems are therefore very common with many varieties.

Spots

Spots are caused by the skin producing extra grease, which blocks the pores, causing bacteria to be trapped beneath the surface. Spots can occur at times of hormonal changes such as during adolescence or during or just before menstruation and can be reflective of stress or a diet lacking in essential nutrients.

Acne, is a more severe and prolonged amount of spots, usually on the face and neck, often associated with puberty and adolescence. Acne can be distressing and may require medical treatment.

How can I treat spots?

- Wash the affected area twice a day with plain water or a mild product – avoid strong soaps.
- Avoid greasy, heavy, make-up and cleanse the skin thoroughly every night.
- Natural sunlight, vitamin A and a number of other nutrients are important in maintaining healthy skin.
- Squeezing or playing with your spots may only make them worse and could cause scarring.
- If you get a sudden bout of spots it could be an allergic reaction – see page 25 opposite.
- There are many treatments available in your pharmacy such as creams, face-washes, cleansers and abrasives (although excessive use can make things worse).
- Drinking plenty of water and eating a healthy balanced diet can help keep skin free from spots.

Where to get advice

- Your pharmacist can recommend the best treatment and give advice for mild-moderate spots.
- If you suffer from severe acne visit your GP who may prescribe antibiotics or refer you to a specialist.
- If you also have a headache, pain, high temperature or other symptoms ask your pharmacist, GP or call NHS Direct 0845 4647 (England and Wales only) for advice as it could be a more generalised infection such as chickenpox.

Rashes and Insect Bites

Rashes can be the result of heat, sweat and friction or an allergic reaction caused by your body being over-sensitive to certain substances. Insect bites become itchy and reddened and stings can be painful.

How can I treat rashes and insect bites?

- There are a wide range of creams, lotions and sprays available from your pharmacist that will ease rashes, help clear up the redness and soothe pain.
- For rashes due to allergic reactions, insect bites or wasp stings there are a range of antihistamine creams, local anaesthetics and hydrocortisone creams that can provide relief.
- Bees only sting once and can leave their sting behind. This should be removed by scraping with a thumbnail or tweezers before applying an ointment or cream. Do not squeeze the area as this may force it more into your flesh.
- Get insect repellent to prevent bites if you are going abroad or where you think your risk of being bitten is higher than normal.

Where to get advice

- Ask your pharmacist or call NHS Direct 0845 4647 (England and Wales only) for advice on what medicine would be most suited to your particular rash or bite.
- If you also have headaches, pain, a high temperature or other symptoms ask a pharmacist, GP or call NHS Direct 0845 4647 (England and Wales only) for advice as it could be a more generalised infection such as chickenpox.

Athlete's Foot

Symptoms: itchy, sore skin between the toes that will eventually crack and peel. Sometimes appears white, inflamed and weepy.

Athlete's foot is a skin disease caused by a fungus, often occurring between the toes. The fungus most commonly attacks skin on the feet because shoes create a warm, dark, and humid environment, encouraging fungus growth. It is commonly picked up from showers and changing room floors in gyms and swimming baths. Around one in seven adults is affected by athlete's foot at any one time.

How can I treat athlete's foot?

- Antifungal preparations for feet, shoes and socks are available at the pharmacy. They come in creams, sprays, ointments and dusting powders, some also contain hydrocortisone to stop the itching.
- Avoid walking around barefoot, especially in changing rooms and communal showers.
- Wash feet daily with soap and water, drying carefully – especially between the toes.
- Change your socks and shoes regularly to decrease moisture and help prevent the fungus from infecting the feet.
- If you tend to be a sufferer, try using an anti-fungal foot powder, which is available from the pharmacy.

Where to get advice

- If you need more advice speak to your pharmacist or call NHS Direct 0845 4647 (England and Wales only).

Cold Sores

Symptoms: painful raised blisters around the mouth that can take up to 10 days to form and heal. The virus is highly contagious and can be passed on by kissing, touching another person's mouth or other part of their body.

One in four people get recurrent cold sores. Cold sores are caused by the herpes simplex virus and can not be treated by antibiotics. Some people think this is a form of sexually

transmitted infection (STI) but you can catch herpes without sexual contact. Many people are carriers of the cold sore virus without knowing as it can lie dormant. The virus remains in the system and can be triggered by factors such as stress, being run down, fighting off another infection and exposure to the sun.

How can I treat cold sores?

- Cold sore creams are available from your pharmacist. If used early enough, when there is the initial tingling in the skin, creams can prevent the blister or help it heal more rapidly.
- Prevent spread of cold sores by careful attention to washing, especially hands, not sharing towels and by avoiding physical contact, which may spread the virus to others.

Mouth Ulcers

Symptoms: painful, white blisters within the mouth or on the tongue.

Unlike cold sores, mouth ulcers are not caused by the herpes virus and are thought to occur for a wide range of reasons such as friction on dentures, stress, bacterial or fungus infection, lack of sleep, being run down and essential nutrient deficiency.

How can I treat mouth ulcers?

- There are a number of gels available that contain antiseptics or antibacterial agents combined with pain relief ingredients that can help your mouth ulcer.

Tip: if you frequently suffer from cold sores or mouth ulcers, your lifestyle may be triggering them. Check out **Essential Nutrients** on page 7 and **Stress** on page 9, which may be underlying causes.

Where to get advice

- Speak to your pharmacist or call NHS Direct 0845 4647 (England and Wales only) for more advice.

Cuts and Grazes

How can I treat cuts and grazes?

Rinse a cut or graze under cold running water, allowing the blood to flow out and to wash out any dirt. Cover and apply pressure to the wound for a few minutes to stop bleeding, then dry the area carefully. A sticking plaster can be used for small cuts. Larger cuts should be covered with gauze or a non-stick dressing held in place with tape or a bandage. Grazes should be left open to the air in order to heal.

If you have a deep cut and are losing a lot of blood, apply pressure to stop the bleeding, lift the limb if possible and seek medical help or call NHS Direct on 0845 4647 (England and Wales only) if you are unsure.

Where to get advice

- The pharmacist will be able to provide antiseptic liquids & creams, sticking plasters and dry dressings.
- If the cut is very deep, dirty or caused by a dirty or rusting object a tetanus jab may be required from your GP surgery.
- If the wound is red and inflamed with pus it may be infected, call your GP surgery or NHS Direct on 0845 4647 (England and Wales only) if you are unsure.
- If the wound has a foreign body in it (e.g. glass), call your GP surgery or NHS Direct on 0845 4647 (England and Wales only).
- If the cut is deep and does not stop bleeding seek urgent medical assistance or call your GP surgery or NHS Direct on 0845 4647 (England and Wales only).



Burns and Scalds

Burns are caused by dry heat, such as hot objects, the sun or flames, and scalds are caused by steam, hot liquid or hot fat.

How can I treat burns and scalds?

The urgent priority for burns or scalds is to cool the injury by getting it under cold water as soon as possible and holding it there for at least ten minutes. Remove any jewellery, belts or shoes in case of swelling in the case of a moderate to severe burn. Cover the burn with a sterile dressing. Do not break blisters or touch the burned area.

Where to get advice

- If you have a minor burn, ask your pharmacist for ointments that are available to provide soothing relief.
- If you have a severe burn or severe sunburn, have a chemical or electrical burn or injury to the eyes contact your local Accident and Emergency department at hospital or dial 999.



Cystitis

Symptoms: burning sensation during urination, frequent, urgent need to urinate, only a small amount of urine is passed. Severe symptoms also include a burning sensation during and after urination, dark and cloudy urine that may smell. Sometimes there is lower back pain or a raised temperature.

Cystitis is an inflammation of the bladder. Over two million women are known to suffer from cystitis every year in the UK. Bacterial infection is the most common form of cystitis which makes the urine more acidic than normal, causing stinging and burning. Women are more susceptible to cystitis than men because of the smaller distance between the anus, where most bacteria comes from, and the urethra through which urine is passed.

How can I treat cystitis?

- Speak to your pharmacist about the range of treatments available. Let your pharmacist know if you suffer from high blood pressure, impaired kidney function, are pregnant or are on a low-salt diet as some remedies containing sodium would be unsuitable for you. Many pharmacies have a quiet area if you want to speak in private away from other customers, just ask.
- Drink plenty of fluids but avoid tea, coffee and citrus fruit juices. However, slightly acidic drinks such as cranberry juice or lemon squash are considered very good. Fluid intake dilutes the urine, helping to 'flush out' the bacteria.
- A hot water bottle on the tummy can work wonders.

Where to get advice

- Antibiotic treatment may be required in severe cases, speak to your GP.
- If suffering from severe cystitis with fever, nausea, heavy vaginal discharge, abdominal pain, blood in your urine or your symptoms do not go away after a few days with treatment speak to your GP or call NHS Direct 0845 4647 (England and Wales only).
- If a woman who is pregnant or a man or child has these symptoms they should contact their GP or call NHS Direct 0845 4647 (England and Wales only).

Vaginal Thrush

Symptoms: thick, white, vaginal discharge. There may be a bad odour, especially during menstruation. The onset of thrush can cause a lot of itching and irritation both inside and outside the vagina. The vulva (vaginal lips) may look very red and inflamed, and may burn, sting, or itch, and are easily hurt by scratching or sexual activity. In very severe cases, ulcers may form, and bacterial infections may occur in the damaged tissues.

Thrush is one of the most common forms of vaginal infection caused by fungus or yeast. Roughly 50 per cent of women aged between 16 and 60 suffer from vaginal thrush, and nearly one-third will have at least one episode a year. Known aggravators of thrush include the contraceptive pill, diabetes, long-term use of antibiotics, oral corticosteroid treatment, pregnancy, tight clothing or perfumed vaginal deodorants and harsh soaps that kill the bacteria that prevents thrush.

How can I treat thrush?

- An antifungal capsule or cream is the most common form of treating vaginal thrush. Some treatments include pessaries or tablets that are inserted high up in the vagina to stop infection. Ask your pharmacist for advice.
- Eat live yoghurt and apply it to the vaginal area.
- Wear loose, comfortable clothing and avoid tights and tight trousers.
- Maintain good hygiene.
- Wipe from front to back after passing a motion (having a poo).
- Some treatments may reduce the effectiveness of condoms or diaphragms so check with you pharmacist for advice.

Where to get advice

- Before using a treatment seek advice from your pharmacist. Your pharmacist will ask you some questions in order to identify the most suitable treatment. Many pharmacies have a quiet area if you want to speak in private away from other customers, just ask.
- Treatments should give relief within a week. If not, or if you have suffered more than two attacks in six months, have blood stained vaginal discharge, ulcers or blisters on the vagina, have severe

abdominal pain, sickness or fever, are pregnant or are under 16 or over 60 years old, speak to your GP or call NHS Direct 0845 4647 (England and Wales only).

- If you are unsure and think you may have a sexually transmitted disease go to a local genito-urinary clinic, or speak to your practice nurse or GP.

More information

NHS Direct

For 24 hour telephone advice
(England and Wales only) call 0845 4647
or log on to www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

Proprietary Association of Great Britain

www.medicine-chest.co.uk
www.chic.org.uk

National Pharmaceutical Association

www.askyourpharmacist.co.uk



www.dpp.org.uk



www.chic.org.uk

This booklet contains general information produced by Developing Patient Partnerships (formerly Doctor Patient Partnership) and the Proprietary Association of Great Britain which can be used as the first step to help you decide the best course to take when you or your family are not well. In the absence of any examination, it is not possible to reliably diagnose and treat a medical condition. Diagnosis can only be carried out by a suitably qualified health professional after a consultation. The advice and guidance in this booklet is the responsibility of Developing Patient Partnerships and the Proprietary Association of Great Britain.

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