

Prescribing of medicines available to **purchase** **Over-the-counter for self-care**

NHS North Cumbria does not support the prescription of medicines and treatments for self-limiting and minor health conditions where:

- **Self-care is the most appropriate route**
- **Medicines and treatments are available to buy over the counter**

All prescribers within North Cumbria, including non-medical prescribers working in general practice, Extended hours, out-of-hours, Minor Injury Units and A&E departments, should not prescribe readily available over the counter (OTC) medicines.

Community pharmacists should support this approach and not routinely advise patients to request their GP to prescribe OTC medicines available for self-limiting conditions and minor health conditions where these are available to purchase.

The following self-limiting and minor health conditions can be treated effectively and safely using over the counter medicines. Treatments for these conditions are no longer recommended on prescription.

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

For details of exclusions to this guidance and specific patient queries, please refer to [NHS England 'Conditions for which over the counter items should not routinely be prescribed in primary care: Guidance for CCGs'](#) (March 2018)

Who is affected by the change?

It will apply to everyone who is not covered by the general or [condition-specific exceptions](#) listed in the [guidance document](#).

General exceptions that apply to the recommendation to self-care

- Patients prescribed an OTC treatment for a long term condition (e.g. regular pain relief for chronic arthritis or treatments for inflammatory bowel disease).
- For the treatment of more complex forms of minor illnesses (e.g. severe migraines that are unresponsive to over the counter medicines).
- For those patients that have symptoms that suggest the condition is not minor (i.e. those with red flag symptoms for example indigestion with very bad pain.)
- Treatment for complex patients (e.g. immunosuppressed patients).
- Patients on prescription only treatments.
- Patients prescribed OTC products to treat an adverse effect or symptom of a more complex illness and/or prescription only medications should continue to have these products prescribed on the NHS.
- Circumstances where the product licence doesn't allow the product to be sold over the counter to certain groups of patients. This may vary by medicine, but could include babies, children and/or women who are pregnant or breastfeeding. Community Pharmacists will be aware of what these are and can advise accordingly.
- Patients with a minor condition suitable for self-care that has not responded sufficiently to treatment with an OTC product.
- Patients where the clinician considers that the presenting symptom is due to a condition that would not be considered a minor condition.
- Circumstances where the prescriber believes that in their clinical judgement, exceptional circumstances exist that warrant deviation from the recommendation to self-care.
- Individual patients where the clinician considers that their ability to self-manage is compromised as a consequence of medical, mental health or significant social vulnerability to the extent that their health and/or wellbeing could be adversely affected, if reliant on self-care.
- To note that being exempt from paying a prescription charge does not automatically warrant an exception to the guidance.
- Consideration should also be given to safeguarding issues.

This guidance is intended to encourage people to self-care for minor illnesses as the first stage of treatment. It is envisaged that in most cases (unless specified) these minor conditions will clear up with appropriate self-care. If symptoms are not improving or responding to treatment, then patients should be encouraged to seek further advice.

GPs and/or pharmacists should refer patients to [NHS Choices](#), the [Self Care Forum](#) or NHS 111 for further advice on when they should seek GP Care. [The Royal Pharmaceutical Society](#) offers advice on over the counter products that should be kept in a medicine cabinet at home to help patients treat a range of self-treatable illnesses.

It is NOT intended to discourage patients from going to the GP when it is appropriate to do so.