



# KEEP CALM AND LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

Colds, sore throats, hangovers, upset stomachs and headaches can all be treated by you at home.

## Your guide to self care

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[www.keepcalmthiswinter.org.uk](http://www.keepcalmthiswinter.org.uk)

 @keepcalmne

# Keep calm and be ready for winter

During the winter months, the demand for NHS services increases significantly as cold weather means there are more slips, trips and injuries. Generally more of us feel unwell during the winter as we spend more time indoors and coughs and colds are passed around our family, friends and colleagues at work.

This all adds up to more of us having an accident or becoming unwell with a winter bug, meaning more people want to see their GP, attend accident and emergency or call 999.

If you are normally healthy there are many winter ailments and illnesses that can be easily treated at home with the aid of some common sense advice and a range of medicines you can buy from a shop or local pharmacy.

By looking after yourself first, you can help free up the time of your GP, meaning they can spend that time looking after people with more complex health conditions who are less able to shrug off winter illnesses and become seriously unwell as a result.

To help you during the winter months, we have prepared a guide to show you how you can treat some common winter illnesses.



# What's in this guide?

<b>General advice for winter</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>What medicines should I have at home?</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Colds and coughs</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Flu</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Aches, pains and soreness</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Sore throat</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Upset stomach, diarrhoea and vomiting</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Cold sores</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Advice on when you should seek further help</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Information on your local NHS services</b>	<b>20</b>

*Information correct at October 2014*

# General advice for winter

## Your local pharmacist can help

Pharmacists are experts in the use of medicines and are able to diagnose and offer treatment for a range of minor illnesses and ailments immediately, without the need to make an appointment. They are open long hours, at weekends and evenings and can be found on the local high street and in supermarkets.



Pharmacists can give advice, or where appropriate, medicines that can help to clear up the problem and offer a range of branded or non-branded medicines. If you have any questions about any medicines, they would be happy to talk to you.

Instead of booking an appointment with your GP, you can see your local pharmacist any time by just walking in.

## Make sure you order your repeat prescription

If you or someone you care for requires medicines regularly, make sure you order and collect repeat prescriptions in good time to ensure you or your family have enough medicine to last over the festive period. Many of the calls to out of hours health services are for emergency repeat prescriptions when people have run out of their medication – a situation that could be avoided with some forethought and planning. By thinking ahead about your regular medication you are helping our busy out of hours doctors and nurses.



## Know when your GP surgery will be open

Your local GP practice will be closed over the festive period and may also offer limited appointments around Christmas and New Year. If you need to see a GP when the practice is closed, contact the NHS 111 service.



## Antibiotics aren't always the answer

Antibiotics can save lives. Using them wisely is the only way to preserve their strength for future bacterial illnesses.

Many winter illnesses such as colds, sore throats and flu are caused by viruses which won't respond to antibiotics. Antibiotics only fight infections caused by bacteria.

Bacteria can adapt and find ways to survive the effects of an antibiotic. They become 'antibiotic resistant' so that antibiotics no longer work. The more an antibiotic is used the more resistant bacteria become to it.

Antibiotics can have side effects as they upset the natural balance of bacteria in your body and this allows other more harmful bacteria to increase. Common symptoms can result in diarrhoea and/or thrush.

It's important that we use antibiotics the right way, to slow down resistance and make sure these life-saving medicines remain effective for us and future generations.

Antibiotics aren't always the answer. Take rest and paracetamol and drink plenty of fluids instead.

# What medicines should I keep at home?

Even minor illness and ailments – such as colds, headaches or diarrhoea – can disrupt your life and make you feel grotty.

You can be prepared for most common winter ailments by keeping a well-stocked medicine cabinet at home and feel better in a couple of days without the need to see a doctor.

## **Remember:**

- + Always follow the direction on medicine packets and information leaflets
- + Never exceed the stated dose
- + Always keep medicines out of sight and reach of children
- + Keep your medicines in a high and lockable cupboard in a cool, dry place

Here are some of the medicines that we recommend that you should keep in your medicine cabinet. You should also keep a well-prepared first aid kit as this can help to treat minor cuts, sprains and bruises and can reduce the risk of cuts becoming infected.



## Medicine or first aid

## What it's used for

### **Paracetamol and ibuprofen**

Effective at relieving most minor aches and pains such as headaches, period pain, inflammation in arthritis and sprains.

### **Oral rehydration salts (such as Dioralyte®)**

Fever, diarrhoea and vomiting make us lose water and essential minerals, and can lead to dehydration. If you have these symptoms and can't continue your normal diet, oral rehydration salts can help to restore your body's natural balance of minerals and fluid and relieve discomfort and tiredness. They don't fight the underlying cause of your illness, such as a virus or bacteria.

### **Antacids (come in chewable tablets, or tablets that dissolve in water, or in liquid form)**

We normally over indulge during the festive period and this can cause stomach ache, heartburn or trapped wind. A simple antacid will reduce stomach acidity and bring relief.

## Medicine or first aid

## What it's used for

### Bandages

These can support injured limbs, such as fractures or sprains and can also be used to apply direct pressure to larger cuts before being treated in hospital.

### Plasters

A range of sizes, waterproof if possible. You should clean and dry the wound before you apply the plaster.

### Thermometer

Digital thermometers that you put in your mouth produce very accurate readings. A thermometer placed under the arm is a good way to read a baby's temperature.

### Antiseptic

This can be used to clean cuts before they're dressed. Most can treat a range of conditions, including insect stings. Alcohol-free antiseptic wipes are useful to clean cuts.



## Medicine or first aid

## What it's used for

### Eyewash solution

This will help to wash out grit or dirt in the eyes.

### Sterile dressings

Larger injuries should be covered with a sterile dressing to prevent infection until treatment can be given by a health professional.

### Medical tape

This is used to secure dressings. It can also be used to tape an injured finger to an uninjured one, creating a makeshift splint.

### Tweezers

For taking out splinters. If splinters are left in, they can cause discomfort and become infected.

# Colds and coughs

## Symptoms

The first symptom of a cold is usually a sore or irritated (tickly) throat. This is then followed by other symptoms, including:

- + A blocked nose
- + Nasal pain and irritation
- + Sneezing
- + A runny nose – the discharge is usually clear and runny at first before becoming thicker and darker over the course of the infection
- + Coughing
- + Hoarse voice
- + A general sense of feeling unwell

### **Less common symptoms of a cold can include:**

- + A mild temperature of around 38-39°C
- + Headache
- + Earache
- + Muscle pain
- + Loss of taste and smell
- + A feeling of pressure in your eyes or face



## Duration

The symptoms of a cold are usually at their worst during the first two to three days of the infection. In adults and older children the cold usually lasts for about a week, however, the cough could last for up to three weeks.

Colds tend to last longer in younger children who are under five. Their symptoms usually last for 10-14 days.

## Treatment

In most cases, you can treat the symptoms of a cold at home:

- + Drink plenty of fluids to replace those lost due to sweating and a runny nose
- + Get plenty of rest
- + Gargling with salt water will relieve the symptoms of a sore throat
- + Vapour rubs – these can help soothe the symptoms of a cold in babies and younger children
- + Painkillers – paracetamol, and ibuprofen can help to reduce a fever and will also act as a painkiller. These painkillers can often be included in over the counter cold medicines, so it is important to check with your pharmacist or GP before taking a cold remedy if you're taking any other medicines. **NB: Aspirin and preparations containing aspirin should not be given to children under the age of 16**
- + Seek prompt medical advice for any child with a temperature above 39°C (above 38°C if aged less than 6 months)
- + Antibiotics are not prescribed for colds as they have no effect on viruses

# Flu

## Symptoms

The symptoms of a common cold and flu are very similar, but flu is much more severe. Symptoms may include:

- + Sudden fever of 38°C or above
- + Headache
- + Aching muscles
- + Limb or joint pain
- + Diarrhoea or upset stomach
- + Runny or blocked nose
- + Dry, chesty cough
- + Tiredness
- + Chills
- + Loss of appetite
- + Sore throat
- + Sneezing

## Duration

The symptoms of flu will usually peak after two to three days and you should begin to feel better within five to eight days. You may have a lingering cough and still feel very tired for a further two to three weeks.

## Treatment

Flu can generally be managed effectively at home. You should:

- + Drink plenty of fluids to replace those lost due to sweating and a runny nose
- + Get plenty of rest and keep warm
- + Painkillers – paracetamol and ibuprofen will lower a high temperature and relieve the aches caused by flu



- + Antibiotics are not prescribed for flu as they have no effect on viruses. Occasionally your GP may need to treat the complications of flu, especially serious chest infections or pneumonia, with a course of antibiotics

## Aches, pains and soreness

### Symptoms

As we get older, it is natural for us to begin to experience general aches, pains and stiffness in the joints and lower back. These symptoms are rarely due to a serious underlying cause and are often worse in the cold winter months.

### Duration

Generalised aches and pains should usually begin to improve within three to four days and should last no more than six weeks. If the pain worsens over time or recurs regularly for longer than six weeks you should contact your GP.

### Treatment

- + Keep moving – remain as active as possible, even if you're uncomfortable. It won't cause you any harm but it could help you to get better more quickly
- + Heat and cold – a hot bath or hot water bottle can ease the pain of tense muscles, while cold from an ice pack or a bag of frozen peas (wrap in a damp cloth and apply to the painful area) can help to relieve the discomfort
- + Painkillers – painkillers such as paracetamol and ibuprofen will be effective in most cases. 'Rub-on' (topical) treatments may also help

# Sore throat

## Symptoms

A sore throat is normally a symptom of a viral infection, which will get better by itself. Symptoms may include:

- + Swollen tonsils (two small glands found at the back of your throat, behind the tongue)
- + Enlarged and tender glands in your neck
- + A painful, tender feeling at the back of your throat
- + Discomfort when swallowing

If you have a sore throat, you may also experience other symptoms associated with common infectious conditions, such as:

- + A high temperature of 38°C or over
- + Aching muscles
- + A headache
- + Tiredness
- + A cough
- + A runny nose

These other symptoms will depend on what infection is causing your sore throat.



## Duration

The duration of your sore throat will depend on what infection is causing it, but will usually pass in three to seven days. If you have a sore throat you should make an appointment to see your GP if:

- + You have a persistent high temperature above 38°C which is not reduced by medication
- + Your symptoms do not improve after two weeks
- + You have frequent sore throats that do not respond to painkillers, such as paracetamol or ibuprofen

## Treatment

For treating sore throats, over-the-counter painkillers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen are usually recommended. These may also help to reduce a high temperature.

To help relieve the symptoms of a sore throat you should:

- + Avoid food or drink that is too hot as this could irritate your throat
- + Eat cool, soft food and drink cool or warm liquids
- + Adults and older children can suck lozenges, hard sweets, ice cubes or ice lollies
- + Avoid smoking and smoky environments
- + Regularly gargle with a mouthwash of warm salty water to reduce any swelling or pain
- + Drink enough fluids, especially if you have a high temperature

# Upset stomach, diarrhoea and vomiting

## Symptoms

Norovirus, or the winter vomiting bug, is the most common stomach bug in the UK, affecting people of all ages. The first sign of norovirus is usually a sudden sick feeling followed by forceful vomiting and watery diarrhoea, which occurs 24 to 48 hours after you have been infected. Most people make a full recovery within a couple of days.

### Symptoms include:

- + Loose, watery stools or diarrhoea (stools may contain traces of mucus)
- + A high temperature of 38°C or above
- + Nausea and vomiting
- + Stomach cramps

If the diarrhoea or vomiting is severe and you are losing more fluid than you can take in, you run the risk of becoming dehydrated. The symptoms of dehydration are:

- + Passing little or no urine
- + Tiredness
- + Dizziness
- + Muscle cramps
- + Rapid heartbeat
- + Headaches
- + Dry mouth



## Duration

Winter vomiting is spread very easily from person to person, so take care with hand washing and general hygiene to protect the rest of your family. Take care not to infect other vulnerable people such as older people or those with a lower immune system like diabetics.

**Do not go to your GP, A&E or any other health clinic as you risk infecting other people.**

Your symptoms should begin to improve after 48 hours but may continue for up to seven days. If you are still vomiting after 48 hours have passed, or if the diarrhoea is not beginning to settle after four days, you should telephone your GP for advice.

## Treatment

Most diarrhoea and vomiting do not require treatment and will improve after a few days. You can manage the symptoms at home:

- + Drink plenty of fluids - it is important that you replace any fluids that your body loses through vomiting or diarrhoea. Drink at least two litres (3.5 pints) of water a day, plus 200ml (a third of a pint) of water every time you pass diarrhoea.
- + Try to maintain a healthy diet - avoid eating foods that are high in fat or sugar as they could make your symptoms worse. You will be able to tolerate light, plain foods such as rice or wholemeal bread, better than you can spicy or rich foods. It may be easier for you to eat six small meals a day rather than three larger meals

To reduce the risk of passing the virus on to others it is important to wash your hands regularly and stay at home until you are clear of symptoms for 48 hours.

# Cold sores

## Symptoms

Cold sores are small blisters that develop on the lips or around the mouth, caused by the herpes simplex virus. You will not usually notice any symptoms when you are first infected. When the outbreak of cold sores does happen, the symptoms are:

- + A tingling, itching or burning sensation around your mouth
- + Small fluid-filled sores, commonly on the edge of the lower lip
- + Sore throat

## Duration

Cold sores will usually disappear by themselves, without treatment, after 7 to 10 days.

## Treatment

Cold sores will usually clear up without treatment and without any scarring, however, anti-viral cold sore creams can be bought over the counter which may speed up the healing time of a cold sore infection.

Cold sore creams are most effective if they are applied as soon as symptoms develop and before the blisters appear. Using an anti-viral cream after this initial period is unlikely to have much effect.



# Advice on when you should seek further help

These symptoms are listed in order of urgency, with the most urgent first:

1. If you develop a severe headache and are sick
2. If your skin is very cold or has a strange colour, or you develop an unusual rash
3. If you feel confused, have slurred speech or are very drowsy
4. If you have difficulty breathing. Signs that suggest breathing problems can include:
  - + Breathing quickly
  - + Turning blue around the lips and the skin below the mouth
  - + Skin between or above the ribs getting sucked or pulled in with every breath
5. If you develop chest pain
6. If you have difficulty swallowing or are drooling
7. If you cough up blood
8. If hearing problems develop or if there is fluid coming out of your ears

# Information on your local NHS services

If you are injured or unwell there are a number of different NHS services that you can access. If you are unsure if a service can treat your condition, just call ahead and ask.

## Pharmacist

Your local pharmacy provides expert advice on common health problems and many pharmacies have early and late opening hours.

Details are available at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) or by calling the 111 service.

### Think Pharmacy First



This scheme is designed so that if patients are unwell, they may not need to make an appointment to see a GP, they can instead go to a local community pharmacist who will provide free advice on the best treatment for a wide range of illnesses and minor ailments.

As well as free medical advice, the local community pharmacy can now also provide free medication for some illnesses and minor ailments under Think Pharmacy First. Think Pharmacy First allows people who receive free prescriptions to go straight to their pharmacist to receive treatment without needing to visit their GP to get a prescription first.

The scheme is available to adults who are entitled to free prescriptions on the grounds of low income and their children along with all people aged 60 or over.

To get this free treatment, patients will need to sign the prescription the pharmacist prescribes and show proof that they do not have to pay. Proof could be their HC2 certificate or income support.



To receive free medicines for a child on the Think Pharmacy First scheme the parent or guardian must also be eligible for free prescriptions.

## GP practices and out of hours GP services

Your GP practice treats the majority of your healthcare needs and is usually the first point of contact for most medical issues.

Everyone should be registered with a GP practice - if you are not registered, you can find information about local GP practices at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk).

GP practices are usually open Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays). Many now open extended hours – sometimes earlier in the morning or later in the evening and some are open on a Saturday. Please check with your practice for details.

If you need to see a GP when your own practice is closed, contact the 111 service who can help.

## Urgent dental treatment and out of hours access

You can contact the out of hours dental service through the 111 service.

## NHS Walk-in Centres or NHS Minor Injuries Units

For treatment of minor illnesses or injuries without an appointment choose an NHS Walk-in Centre or Minor Injuries Unit:

**Battle Hill Health Centre Walk-in Service**, Belmont Close, Wallsend, NE28 9DX. Tel: 0191 295 8520.

A GP led service, open 8am to 8pm, seven days a week.

[\(continued overleaf\)](#)

## **NHS Walk-in Centres or NHS Minor Injuries Units**

**Shiremoor Minor Injuries Walk-in Service**, Shiremoor Health Resource Centre, Earsdon Road, NE27 0HJ. Tel: 0191 297 9000. Open Monday to Friday 9am to 6pm, closed bank holidays. A walk-in clinic for people up to the age of 17.

**Wansbeck Primary Care Access Centre**, Wansbeck General Hospital, Woodhorn Lane, Ashington, NE63 9JJ. Tel: 01670 529205. Open 8:30am to 6:30pm, Monday to Friday. (Before you can attend you must call the centre for an appointment)

### **A&E or 999 – for health emergencies only**

Please **ONLY** use the 999 service for serious health emergencies which include: a major accident, broken bones, breathing problems, severe chest pains, unconsciousness, suspected stroke and severe blood loss.

## **For further information, please contact:**

### **NHS North Tyneside Clinical Commissioning Group**

12 Hedley Court, Orion Business Park,  
North Shields, NE29 7ST

Tel: 0191 293 1140

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