NHS
Suffolk and
North East Essex

Changes to how the NHS prescribes over the counter medicines for minor health conditions.

In March 2018, NHS England published guidance about reducing the prescribing of medicines or treatments that are available to buy 'over the counter'.

This means that certain medicines may no longer be prescribed if you can buy them 'over the counter'. This leaflet will explain the changes, why they are happening, and where you can get more information and support.

This guidance applies to all patients, including those who would be exempt from paying prescription charges.

What conditions are included in this change?

Medicines available to buy 'over the counter' will not be routinely prescribed for the following thirty-five conditions:

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

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Adapted for use by the SNEE Medicines Optimisation Teams. Approved by IMOC June 2023

Probiotics, and some vitamins and minerals, will also no longer be routinely prescribed, because most people can, and should, get these from eating a healthy, varied, and balanced diet.

Why does the NHS want to reduce prescribing of these medicines?

The NHS has to make difficult choices about what it spends taxpayer money on and how much value the taxpayer is getting for that money.

Medicines to treat these conditions are available to buy 'over the counter'. Trained pharmacy staff can advise patients on self-care and also on which are the lowest cost versions of medicines available.

By reducing the amount the NHS spends on treating these minor health conditions, the NHS can give priority to treatments for patients with more serious conditions such as cancer and mental health problems.

What are the benefits of going to the pharmacy instead of making an appointment to see your GP?

Pharmacy teams have the knowledge and skills to help with many healthcare conditions, and you don't need an appointment to speak to them. Visiting a pharmacy first helps to make more GP appointments available for people with more complex healthcare needs.

If you have something more serious, the pharmacist is trained to signpost you quickly to the right medical care.

What can you do?

By keeping certain useful medicines at home, you can treat common conditions immediately and you won't need to see a GP. The medicines you may want to keep at home could include:

- A painkiller to help treat minor conditions associated with pain, discomfort, and fever.
- Indigestion medicines, oral rehydration salts, and treatments for constipation and diarrhoea.
- Treatments for seasonal conditions such as colds and hay fever.
- Sunblock and after sun.
- Some basic first aid items would also be useful.

If you have children, make sure you also have products suitable for them.

Speak to your pharmacy team for advice on what medicines to keep at home, how to use them, and where to store them safely.

Ensuring you have a well-balanced, healthy diet will mean that most people don't need to take vitamin supplements or probiotics. If you do wish to take these products to avoid you becoming deficient, you can buy them from a number of retail outlets, including pharmacies and supermarkets.

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What about patients who need to take medicines for these conditions regularly, or in special situations?

Some individual patients may still be prescribed a medicine for a condition on the list. The reasons vary for each condition and GPs, nurses, or clinical pharmacists will speak to you individually if this applies you.

The main reasons are:

- Treatment for a long-term condition, e.g., regular pain relief for chronic arthritis, treatments for inflammatory bowel disease.
- Treatment of more complex forms of minor illnesses, e.g., migraines that are severe, and where 'over the counter' medicines do not work.
- Patients prescribed 'over the counter' medicines to treat a side effect of a prescription medicine, or symptom of another illness e.g., constipation when taking certain painkillers.
- The medicine has a licence which doesn't allow it to be sold 'over the counter' for use in certain groups of patients. This may vary by medicine, but could include babies, children, or women who are pregnant or breast-feeding.
- The prescriber thinks that a patient cannot treat themselves, for example because of mental health problems or severe social vulnerability (not just a low income).

What if my symptoms don't improve?

Trained pharmacy staff can advise on how long you can expect to experience symptoms for the conditions listed. If your symptoms have not improved after this time, or you start to feel a lot worse, contact your GP or call 111. A&E and 999 should only be used for life threatening emergencies. There is lots of advice on the NHS choices website to help you choose the right service: https://www.nhs.uk/NHSENGLAND/ABOUTNHSSERVICES/Pages/NHSservices.aspx

Where can you find more information and support?

- You can speak to your local pharmacy team, who can help with advice and treatments for the conditions listed.
- NHS choices has lots of information and advice on treating minor health problems with self-care: https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/home-remedies-for-common-conditions/
- Find out more about the conditions for which 'over the counter' medicines will no longer be prescribed at: https://www.england.nhs.uk/medicines-2/items-which-should-not-be-routinely-prescribed/
- Find out more abut this change to prescription policy at: Why can't I get a prescription for an over the counter medicine? - NHS (www.nhs.uk)

If you have any questions about the items which are no longer going to be prescribed, please email the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS): sneeicb.pals@nhs.net

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