

Self-Care Guide - Your Medicine Cabinet

Be prepared for common ailments by keeping a well-stocked medicine cabinet at home.

This list, recommended by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, will help you deal with most minor ailments.

- ***Pain relief***

Painkillers like aspirin, paracetamol and ibuprofen are highly effective at relieving most minor aches and pains, such as headaches and period pain.

These medicines also help with some minor ailments, such as the common cold, by reducing aches, pain and high temperatures.

Paracetamol, aspirin and ibuprofen also help reduce the inflammation seen in arthritis and sprains.

Bear in mind:

- aspirin mustn't be given to children under 16
- ibuprofen must be taken with caution if you have certain conditions, such as asthma – check with your pharmacist if in doubt
- pregnant women shouldn't take ibuprofen – visit the bumps website to find out more about taking medicines when you're pregnant

- ***Antihistamines***

These are useful for dealing with allergies and insect bites. They're also helpful if you have hay fever.

Antihistamines can come in the form of creams you apply to the skin (topical antihistamine) or tablets you swallow (oral antihistamine).

Antihistamine creams soothe insect stings and bites, and rashes and itching from stinging nettles.

Antihistamine tablets help control hay fever symptoms and calm minor allergic reactions to food. They can also help calm itchiness during chickenpox.

Some antihistamines may cause drowsiness. Ask your pharmacist about this as there are some antihistamines that don't cause drowsiness.

- ***Oral rehydration salts***

Fever, diarrhoea and vomiting make us lose water and essential minerals, and can lead to dehydration.

Oral rehydration salts, available at pharmacies, are an easy way to help restore your body's natural balance of minerals and fluid, and help your recovery.

But they don't fight the cause of your illness, such as a virus or bacteria.

- **Anti-diarrhoea tablets**

Diarrhoea is caused by a range of things, such as food poisoning or a stomach virus, and can happen without warning. It's a good idea to keep an anti-diarrhoea medicine at home. Anti-diarrhoea remedies can quickly control the symptoms of diarrhoea, although they don't deal with the underlying cause.

The most common anti-diarrhoeal is loperamide, sold under the names Imodium, Arret and Diasorb, among others. It works by slowing down the action of your gut.

Don't give anti-diarrhoea medicines to children under 12 as they may have undesirable side effects. Speak to your GP or pharmacist for advice about a child with these symptoms.

- **Indigestion treatment**

If you have stomach ache or heartburn, a simple antacid will reduce stomach acidity and bring relief.

Antacids come as chewable tablets, tablets that dissolve in water, or in liquid form.

- **Sunscreen**

Keep a sun lotion of at least factor 15. Even fairly brief exposure to the sun can cause sunburn and increase your risk of skin cancer. Ensure your sunscreen provides UVA protection.

You can protect yourself against the sun further by wearing a hat and sunglasses, and by avoiding the sun during the hottest part of the day between 11am and 3pm.

Your first aid kit

A well-prepared first aid kit can help treat minor cuts, sprains and bruises, and reduce the risk of cuts becoming infected.

It should contain the following items:

- **bandages** – these can support injured limbs, such as a sprained wrist, and also apply direct pressure to larger cuts before being treated in hospital
- **plasters** – a range of sizes, waterproof if possible
- **thermometer** – digital thermometers that you put in your mouth produce very accurate readings; an under-arm thermometer or an ear thermometer are good ways to read a baby or young child's temperature
- **antiseptic** – this can be used to clean cuts before they're bandaged, and most can treat a range of conditions, including insect stings, ulcers and pimples; alcohol-free antiseptic wipes are useful to clean cuts
- **eyewash solution** – this will help 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 stick dressings on the skin and 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

Medicine safety

When keeping medicines at home, remember:

- always follow the directions on medicine packets and information leaflets, and never take more than the stated dose
- always keep medicines out of the sight and reach of children – a high, lockable cupboard in a cool, dry place is ideal
- regularly check the expiry dates on a medicine – if a medicine is past its use-by date, don't use it or throw it away: take it to your pharmacy, where it can be disposed of safely
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If you have questions about any medicines or you want to buy them, ask your local pharmacist.

How your pharmacist can help you

Don't forget your local pharmacist can help with many ailments, such as coughs, colds, asthma, eczema, hay fever, and period pain.

They can give advice or, where appropriate, medicines that can help clear up the problem. Instead of booking an appointment with your GP, you can see your local pharmacist any time – just walk in.

Learn more about how your pharmacist can help with treating common conditions. Find your local pharmacy.