

## Self-care Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### 1. What is self-care?

Self-care is where people manage their own medical conditions and buy any medications they require to treat their symptoms instead of being given a prescription. Self-care is appropriate for minor or self-limiting conditions where treatments can be bought from a Community Pharmacy or other shop.

People should be prepared for common illnesses by keeping a well-stocked medicine cabinet at home. <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/your-medicine-cabinet/>

### 2. What is a minor condition?

A minor condition is one where the person suffering does not normally need medical advice and can manage the condition themselves. People can buy medicines for these conditions to treat the symptoms they are experiencing.

See question 25 for a list of the conditions included in the guidance.

### 3. What is a self-limiting condition?

A self-limiting condition is one that will get better on its own and does not need treatment as it will heal or be cured without medicines.

See question 25 for a list of the conditions included in the guidance.

### 4. Why is Wigan Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) recommending self-care?

NHS England have issued self-care guidance advising all CCGs that treatments for minor and self-limiting conditions should not routinely be prescribed and that people should self-care for these conditions.

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/otc-guidance-for-ccgs.pdf>

### 5. What is the aim of the self-care guidance?

The guidance aims to encourage people to self-care for minor and self-limiting conditions as the first stage of treatment.

In most cases these conditions will clear up with appropriate self-care. If symptoms are not improving or responding to treatment, then people should be encouraged to seek further advice.

This will free up appointments in GP practices and mean NHS money is spent where it is most needed.

<https://www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/medicines/why-cant-i-get-prescription-over-counter-medicine/>

## **6. Is this just a cost cutting exercise?**

NHS England have said that there will be some savings from implementing this guidance and it is important to make sure that we get the best value for money for the NHS.

The money saved by not funding medicines for minor or self-limiting conditions can be used for other higher priority areas that have a greater impact for people, support improvements in services and/or deliver transformation that will ensure the long-term sustainability of the NHS.

In addition to saving money, directing people to use their Community Pharmacy for all minor and self-limiting conditions will free up GP appointments for people with more serious conditions.

<https://www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/medicines/why-cant-i-get-prescription-over-counter-medicine/>

## **7. What do people in Wigan think about self-care?**

When we did our engagement events with people living and working in Wigan 85% of people who took part agreed that people should self-care for minor and self-limiting conditions. For the full report of what local people said, visit our website [www.wiganboroughccg.nhs.uk](http://www.wiganboroughccg.nhs.uk)

## **8. Is self-care safe?**

Self-care for minor and self-limiting conditions is safe.

However, it is important that where symptoms suggest a more serious condition the person sees their GP.

People should be encouraged to use their Community Pharmacy as the first port of call for minor and self-limiting conditions as the staff working in Pharmacies will be able to spot more serious conditions and will provide appropriate advice about what to do if symptoms do not get better with self-care.

<https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/pharmacies/what-to-expect-from-your-pharmacy-team/>

## **9. Will all GP practices be implementing self-care?**

Yes, all GP Practices within Wigan will be implementing self-care with the support of the CCG Medicines Management Team.

## **10. Is the GP allowed to advise a person to self-care and not issue a prescription?**

NHS England have advised that self-care is allowed within the GP contract.

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/otc-gms-gp-practice-letter.pdf>

## **11. Is the guidance only for GP Practices?**

No, in Greater Manchester we believe the guidance should be followed by all healthcare professionals. GP Practices, dentists, opticians, district nurses, out of hours services, extended access hubs, walk-in-centres, health visitors, midwives and A&E services are all required to follow the guidance and advise people with minor or self-limiting conditions to self-care.

It is important that all healthcare professionals give the same message: minor or self-limiting conditions should be managed by self-care and Community Pharmacy should be the first port of call for advice and support on the management of these conditions.

**12. Will the guidance be followed by A&E departments?**

Yes, if people go to an A&E department for a minor or self-limiting condition they will be advised to self-care and buy any medicines they need.

**A&E should only be used in very serious or life-threatening situations.**

People with minor and self-limiting conditions should not normally use A&E, they should get advice and support from their Community Pharmacy.

**13. Will the guidance be followed by urgent treatment centres?**

Yes, if people go to an urgent treatment centre with a minor or self-limiting condition they will be advised to self-care and buy any medicines they need.

**14. Will the guidance be followed by walk-in-centres?**

Yes, if people go to a walk in centre with a minor or self-limiting condition they will be advised to self-care and buy any medicines they need.

**15. Will the guidance be followed by hospitals when patients are admitted?**

When you are in hospital your medicines will be provided, however, when you leave hospital you might be asked to buy some medicines to treat any minor conditions such as pain.

[Example – pain killers needed after a simple medical procedure.](#)

**16. Who does the self-care guidance affect?**

The self-care guidance affects most people. There are a few cases where people would not be expected to self-care but this is usually where their symptoms or circumstances suggest that the condition is not minor or self-limiting. See question 26 for times when people are not expected to self-care.

It is likely that most people who pay for their prescriptions are already self-caring for minor or self-limiting conditions so the biggest impact is likely to be seen in those people who get free prescriptions. The self-care guidance from NHS England is clear that the guidance should be applied to all people with minor and self-limiting conditions and that getting free prescriptions is not reason for not following the guidance.

**17. Are children excluded?**

No, the guidance applies to everybody.

**18. Are people over 60 excluded?**

No, the guidance applies to everybody.

**19. Are people with a pre-payment certificate excluded?**

No, the guidance applies to everybody.

**20. Are people who get free prescriptions excluded?**

No, the guidance applies to everybody.

**21. Are people who live in a Care Home excluded?**

No, the guidance applies to everybody.

There may be additional work required to support Care Homes to implement self-care. Please contact the CCG Medicines Management Team for support.

Care Homes can find information here:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/medicines/conditions-for-which-over-the-counter-items-should-not-routinely-be-prescribed/conditions-for-which-over-the-counter-items-should-not-routinely-be-prescribed-in-primary-care-implementation-resources/faqs/>

**22. Does this mean the prescribing of medicines which can be bought is banned?**

No.

The guidance focuses on restricting prescribing minor and self-limiting conditions only. It does not ban prescribing of individual medicines and does not affect management of conditions which are not minor or self-limiting.

See question 25 for a list of the conditions included in the guidance.

See question 26 for information on when the guidance does not apply.

**23. Are people who are already receiving prescriptions for medicines which can be bought for a minor or self-limiting condition excluded?**

No, the guidance applies to everybody. The Medicines Management Team will help GP Practices to review existing prescribing and advise people where there will be any changes to what they get on their prescription.

<https://www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/medicines/why-cant-i-get-prescription-over-counter-medicine/>

**24. Is there a list of medicines that are affected?**

No, there is no list of medicines affected.

Any medicine being used for one of the minor and self-limiting conditions listed in question 25 which can be bought in a Community Pharmacy or other shop is included. This affects hundreds of products and therefore a list of the medicines affected has not been produced.

## 25. What conditions are affected?

Only minor and self-limiting conditions are affected. These have been identified as:

- Conjunctivitis – bacterial and viral
- Coughs, colds and nasal congestion
- Cradle cap
- Dandruff (mild scaling of the scalp without itching). See question 35.
- Diarrhoea in **adults (not children)**. See question 36.
- Dry eyes/sore tired eyes. See question 37.
- Earwax
- Excessive sweating (hyperhidrosis). See question 38.
- Fungal nail infections. See question 39.
- Head lice
- Indigestion and heartburn
- Infant colic
- **Infrequent** cold sores of the lip
- **Infrequent** constipation (duration less than 2 weeks)
- **Infrequent** migraine
- Insect bites and stings
- **Mild** Acne
- **Mild** cystitis (2-3 days)
- **Mild** dry skin
- **Mild** irritant dermatitis
- **Mild to moderate** hayfever/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)
- **Minor** haemorrhoids
- Mouth ulcers. See question 40.
- Nappy rash
- Oral thrush
- **Prevention** of dental caries
- Ringworm/athlete's foot
- Sore throat
- Sunburn due to excessive sun exposure
- Sun protection (except ACBS criteria). See questions 33 and 34.
- Teething/mild toothache
- Threadworms
- Travel sickness
- Warts and verrucae

See question 26 for information on when the self-care guidance does not apply.

## 26. When shouldn't people self-care?

This guidance does not apply to conditions which are not minor or self-limiting which includes:

- **Long term conditions**

Examples - regular pain relief for osteoarthritis, emollients (moisturising creams and ointments) used for eczema, treatments for inflammatory bowel disease, antihistamines for chronic rhinitis that requires year round treatment.

- **Complex forms of minor illnesses**

Example - severe migraines where medicines which can be bought don't work.

- **Conditions which are not minor**

Examples – people with 'red flag' symptoms which suggest a more serious illness, indigestion with very bad pain, serious burns which always require professional medical attention.

- **People with complex medical conditions**

Example – people who are immunosuppressed, treating ringworm or athletes foot in a person with lymphoedema or a history of lower limb cellulitis.

- **Treating a side effect from another medicine**

Example - constipation caused by opioids (strong pain killers).

- **Self-care has been tried but not worked**

Examples - constipation that continues despite using medicines that can be bought and making dietary changes, infant colic causing distress to the baby and not improving.

- **Medicines are needed which are only available on a prescription**

Example – nystatin for oral thrush.

- **The product licence doesn't allow the product to be sold to the person**

Examples – steroid creams for children under the age of 10, steroid creams for use on the face, many products for women who are pregnant or breastfeeding.

- The **prescriber believes that in their clinical judgement, exceptional circumstances exist** that warrant deviation from the recommendation to self-care.

- The person's **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.

Consideration should also be given to safeguarding issues.

Examples - people who do not have the mental capacity to self-care, the patient is not able to self-care as they cannot access a Pharmacy or other outlet such as a housebound patient.

- **The person cannot afford to self-care** – see question 27.

## 27. What if people can't afford to self-care?

When we did our engagement work this was raised as a significant concern by our residents and healthcare professionals. Therefore, within Wigan we will continue to run a Pharmacy Minor Ailment Scheme for people who cannot afford to self-care so that the Pharmacy can provide certain medications free of charge to these people.

People on low income (and their families) who are currently entitled to free prescriptions will be able to use the Pharmacy Minor Ailment Scheme. People will need to show proof of their entitlement to use the Scheme in the same way as they do for their prescriptions.

If a person tells their healthcare professional that they cannot afford to self-care they should be advised to use the Pharmacy Minor Ailment Scheme.

**28. What if people can't get to the Pharmacy/shop to buy medication?**

People should be prepared for common illnesses by keeping a well-stocked medicine cabinet at home. <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/your-medicine-cabinet/>

If a person does not have medicines at home and cannot get out to buy medication themselves and/or has no-one who could do this for them (such as a family member, friend or carer), they can be given a prescription as their ability to self-manage is compromised as a consequence of a medical/social issue. They should be advised to keep a well-stocked medicines cabinet so that if they are able to self-care in the future.

**29. What about people who don't have the mental capacity to self-care?**

Prescribers should continue to provide medicines on a prescription when people do not have the mental capacity to safely self-care.

**30. What about people with a more serious condition?**

People with symptoms of a more serious condition should see their GP or access appropriate services. The Community Pharmacy team will be able to support people to use the most appropriate service for their needs and Pharmacy staff are trained to identify symptoms that suggest a more serious condition. See question 26 for more information.

**31. What if someone is prescribed a prescription only medicine and a medicine which can be bought for one of the affected conditions?**

The Prescriber will review if both medicines are still needed. If they are then the person will be expected to buy the medicine which is available from Pharmacies or other shops and the prescriber will continue to issue prescriptions for the other medication.

[Example - for hay fever sodium cromoglycate eye drops would be bought and a prescription would be given if the person needed a prescription only nasal spray or antihistamine tablets. https://www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/medicines/why-cant-i-get-prescription-over-counter-medicine/](https://www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/medicines/why-cant-i-get-prescription-over-counter-medicine/)

**32. A parent has asked for a prescription for a medication they would usually buy as their child's nursery or school will not administer without a label do I need to prescribe in this case?**

No.

Department of Education (DOE) guidance makes it clear that nurseries and schools can administer non-prescription medicines following the written permission of the child's parent or carer. Prescribers do not need to write a prescription.

Nursery guidance (see page 27, paragraphs 3.45 and 3.46):

[www.foundationyears.org.uk/files/2017/03/EYFS\\_STATUTORY\\_FRAMEWORK\\_2017.pdf](http://www.foundationyears.org.uk/files/2017/03/EYFS_STATUTORY_FRAMEWORK_2017.pdf)

School guidance (see pages 19 and 20):

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/638267/supporting-pupils-at-school-with-medical-conditions.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/638267/supporting-pupils-at-school-with-medical-conditions.pdf)

### **33. When can sunscreen be prescribed?**

Sunscreen is only allowed on the NHS for skin protection against UV radiation in abnormal cutaneous photosensitivity resulting from genetic disorders or photodermatoses, including vitiligo and those resulting from radiotherapy; chronic or recurrent herpes simplex labialis.

Photodermatoses are a group of skin conditions associated with an abnormal reaction to UV radiation. These are classed as either photosensitive or photoaggravated photodermatoses.

Photosensitive dermatoses are caused by light and include polymorphic light eruption (PLE), actinic prurigo, chronic actinic dermatitis, solar urticaria, hydroa vacciniforme, xeroderma pigmentosum, porphyria, drug-induced photosensitivity, photocontact allergic reactions, phytophotodermatitis. Sunscreens should not be prescribed to patients who are taking a potentially photosensitising drug unless they actually experience drug-induced photosensitivity.

Photoaggravated dermatoses are pre-existing skin conditions that can be made worse with light in exposed areas of skin, e.g. cutaneous lupus erythematosus, dermatomyositis, herpes simplex, Darier's disease, pellagra, some cases of rosacea and vitiligo.

Examples of where prescribing sunscreens on the NHS is not appropriate include eczema, following surgery for skin cancers, allergies to regular sunscreens.  
<http://www.pcids.org.uk/clinical-guidance/photodermatoses>

### **34. Can sunscreen be prescribed for people with skin cancer?**

Sunscreens are not allowed on the NHS for those with skin cancers and 'pre-cancers' except when there is an underlying genetic disease such as xeroderma pigmentosum or albinism.

### **35. Dandruff isn't usually a self-limiting condition can prescriptions still be issued?**

No. Dandruff has been identified as a minor condition where self-care is appropriate. People can buy coal tar, selenium or ketoconazole containing shampoos for people aged 12 and over.

### **36. Can prescriptions still be given for rehydration sachets for people with diarrhoea?**

The guidance only applies to adults with acute (short-term) diarrhoea. Children can still be prescribed any medicines they need to manage diarrhoea and adults with longer-term symptoms or symptoms which suggest that their condition is not minor or self-limiting should be directed to the most appropriate service to meet their needs.

Where self-care is appropriate for adults they should be advised that diarrhoea will usually clear up without treatment in 2-4 days. They should drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration. If oral rehydration sachets are being considered, they can be bought from Pharmacies. People should eat as soon as they feel able to.

People aged 60 and over should see their GP if symptoms last for more than 48 hours.



**37. Dry eyes can affect people for many months and are not always self-limiting, can prescriptions still be issued?**

Acute dry eyes has been identified as a minor condition where self-care is appropriate.

People should be encouraged to manage both dry eyes and sore eyes by implementing self-care measures such as good eyelid hygiene and avoidance of environmental factors.

Mild to moderate cases of dry eye syndrome or sore tired eyes can usually be treated using lubricant eye drops, gels or ointments that can be bought.

Where the person has a serious eye condition such as acute glaucoma, keratitis, iritis or corneal ulcer they should be referred appropriately.

Chronic dry eyes is a long-term condition often associated with medication or another long-term condition and prescriptions can be provided.

**38. Excessive sweating is not a self-limiting condition can prescriptions still be issued?**

Excessive sweating has been identified as a minor condition where self-care is appropriate.

People should be advised to buy an antiperspirant such as 20% aluminium chloride hexahydrate which is available from Community Pharmacies.

**39. What products are available for fungal nail infections?**

Antifungal treatment is not needed for nail infections if the person is not troubled by the appearance of the nail(s), and/or infection is asymptomatic.

Amorolfine 5% nail lacquer is available to buy from Community Pharmacies although there is very limited evidence of effectiveness for this product.

**40. What can be bought for young people with mouth ulcers?**

If ulcers are infrequent, mild, and not interfering with daily activities (for example eating), treatment may not be needed. People with trauma, persistent or recurrent mouth ulcers or signs of infection should be referred to their dentist.

Topical anaesthetics such as lidocaine, topical analgesic/anti-inflammatory agents such as benzydamine, and topical antimicrobial agents such as chlorhexidine gluconate oral solution are available to buy. There are no products available to buy for children under the age of 2 months.

**41. I have advised a patient to self-care but the Pharmacy have said that I will need to prescribe a medication as they cannot sell it to this patient – why is this?**

Medications which can be sold have specific licensing requirements which restrict who the medication can be sold to. Pharmacies are only able to legally sell medications to people for self-care in accordance with these licensing requirements. This means that sometimes a Pharmacy may not be able to sell an item.

Examples – hydrocortisone cream for use on the face or genital areas or in a child under the age of 10, chloramphenicol eye drops for children under 2, indigestion treatments for children under 12, all products for athlete's foot for people with diabetes, a wide range of products cannot be sold to people who are pregnant or breast feeding.

<https://www.prescgipp.info/media/4056/227-self-care-and-otc-items-quick-reference-guide-24.pdf>

#### 42. Where can people get information on self-care?

A wide range of information is available to the public on the subjects of health promotion and the management of minor and self-limiting conditions.

Advice from organisations such as the Self Care Forum and the NHS website <https://www.nhs.uk/> is available on the internet.

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/home-remedies-for-common-conditions/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/medicines/why-cant-i-get-prescription-over-counter-medicine/>

<http://www.choosewellmanchester.org.uk/self-care/self-care-information-for-adults/>

Community Pharmacies are able to offer advice on self-care for minor and self-limiting conditions. People won't always need to buy a medicine and Pharmacy staff will provide advice on simple things people can do to help them feel better and as well as medicines which might help.

#### 43. What should I do if a person complains?

Inform the person that you are following national guidance and Greater Manchester policy and that all healthcare professionals have been instructed that prescriptions should not be issued for medication which can be bought for minor and self-limiting conditions.

<https://www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/medicines/why-cant-i-get-prescription-over-counter-medicine/>

Use the information in this FAQ document to answer the person's questions.

Provide a copy of the patient information leaflet available here:

[bit.ly/2M6494H](http://bit.ly/2M6494H)

If the person still wants to complain provide the details of the NHS England complaints team:

**By post to: NHS England, PO Box 16738, Redditch, B97 9PT**

**By email to: [england.contactus@nhs.net](mailto:england.contactus@nhs.net) marked 'For the attention of the complaints team' in the subject line.**

**By telephone: 0300 311 22 33**