

Medicines for Self-Care – Guidance for Prescribers

Nottingham and Nottinghamshire ICB supports national guidance on self-care with medicines that can be purchased as set out in NHS England's:

[Conditions for which over the counter items should not routinely be prescribed in primary care](#)

In-line with this guidance, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire ICB does not support the prescribing of OTC items for:

1. **Items of limited clinical effectiveness (Probiotics, vitamins and minerals)** used to maintain health and to address vitamin and mineral insufficiency. Note that general exceptions in [appendix 2](#) do **not** apply to probiotics, vitamins & minerals. Specific exceptions are listed in full in [appendix 1](#) and include medically diagnosed deficiency and malnutrition including alcoholism.

Maintenance or preventative treatment is not an exception.

Guidance on moving individuals to self-care from Vitamin D3 prescribed for maintenance and prevention is provided in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire ICB's [Position Statement on Selfcare with Vitamin D3](#).

2. **Self-limiting conditions**, i.e. minor conditions that do not need treatment as they will heal or be cured of their own accord. See [appendix 1](#) for a list of conditions for which OTC items should not be routinely prescribed in primary care. Note that general exceptions (see [appendix 2](#)) do **not** apply to self-limiting conditions where there is limited evidence of clinical effectiveness for the treatments used (e.g. items for cough, sore throat and infant colic).
3. **Minor conditions suitable for self-care**, i.e. the person suffering does not normally need to seek medical advice and can manage the condition by purchasing OTC items directly. See [appendix 1](#) for a list of conditions for which OTC items should not be routinely prescribed in primary care.
General exceptions in [appendix 2](#) **do** apply and include prescribing for those 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 the patient's health and/or wellbeing could be adversely affected, if reliant on self-care. Being exempt from paying a prescription charge does not automatically warrant an exception to the guidance. Consideration should also be given to safeguarding issues.
4. **Personal care*** including products for washing and personal hygiene as well as use of moisturisers and sunscreens where there is no current medical condition requiring their use. Individuals have a responsibility for their own personal care.

By reducing spend on treating conditions that are self-limiting or which are suitable for self-care, or on items for which there is little evidence of clinical effectiveness, resources can be used for other higher priority areas that have a greater impact for patients, support improvements in services and/or deliver transformation that will ensure the long-term sustainability of the NHS.

**Personal care is not explicitly listed in NHSE guidance but agreed locally as not suitable for routine prescribing.*

Patient Information:

Patients can seek advice directly with the Community Pharmacist or via referral from the GP Surgery using the minor illness self-care advice and over the counter sales part of Pharmacy First. The advantage of the Pharmacy First referral is that the outcome of the consultation is sent to the GP surgery so that this can be included in the GP patient record.

There are a wide range of OTC treatments available from pharmacies, supermarkets and other retail outlets which are often cheaper than a prescription charge. Generic or “own label” versions are usually the most cost-effective.

There are some restrictions to OTC sales, for example there may be restrictions regarding pregnancy, breastfeeding and age so an NHS prescription may be needed in some circumstances. Most licensing restrictions can be checked at: [Home - electronic medicines compendium \(emc\)](#)

Patients should be signposted to information on self-care:

- [APC Self-care patient information leaflets](#)
- [NHS website](#)
- [The Self-Care Forum](#)

Position Statements:

- [Self-care with Vitamin D](#)
- [Self-care with emollients and soap substitutes](#)
- [Self-care for hay fever / seasonal rhinitis](#)
- [Self-care with paracetamol](#)

Reference: NHS England, NHS Clinical Commissioners. [Conditions for which over the counter items should not routinely be prescribed in Primary Care:](#) (March 2024)

Appendix 1 - Conditions for which OTC items should not be routinely prescribed in primary care.

Items of Limited Clinical Effectiveness (Probiotics, vitamins and minerals)

- General exceptions do not apply
- Specific exceptions are listed below for individual items for which they apply.

Item	Specific Exceptions (in addition to general exceptions list in appendix 2)	Link to APC patient information (if available)
Probiotics	ACBS approved indication or as per local policy.	
Vitamins and minerals for prevention / maintenance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medically diagnosed deficiency, including lifelong or chronic conditions or for those that have undergone surgery that results in malabsorption. Continuing need should be reviewed on a regular basis.(following bariatric surgery vitamin D maintenance dose should be continued and purchased OTC – see local bariatric surgery guidance). <i>NB maintenance or preventative treatment is not an exception.</i> • Calcium and vitamin D for osteoporosis. • Malnutrition including alcoholism (see NICE guidance) • Patients suitable to receive Healthy start vitamins for pregnancy or children between the ages 6 months to their fourth birthday. <i>NB this is not on prescription but commissioned separately</i> 	Click here – Vitamin D

Self-Limiting Conditions

- Prescription for treatment should not routinely be offered in primary care as the condition is self-limiting and will clear up on its own without the need for treatment.
- Symptomatic treatment available to purchase OTC for some self-limiting conditions.
- General exceptions do not apply.
- Specific exceptions are listed below for individual conditions for which they apply

Condition	Specific Exceptions (note that general exceptions do not apply)	Link to APC patient information
Acute sore throat	'Red Flag' symptoms	Click here
Conjunctivitis	'Red Flag' symptoms	Click here
Coughs	'Red Flag' symptoms	Click here
Colds and nasal congestion	'Red Flag' symptoms	Click here
Cradle Cap	If causing distress to the infant and not improving	Click here
Haemorrhoids	'Red Flag' symptoms	Click here
Infant colic	'Red Flag' symptoms	Click here

Infrequent cold sore of lips	Immunocompromised patients. 'Red Flag' symptoms	Click here
Mild cystitis	'Red Flag' symptoms	Click here

Minor Conditions Suitable for Self-Care

- The person suffering does not normally need to seek medical advice and can manage the condition by purchasing OTC items directly.
- General exceptions ([appendix 2](#)) apply.
- In addition to general exceptions, specific exceptions are listed below for the individual conditions for which they apply (where nothing is specified, just the general exceptions apply).

Condition	Specific Exceptions (note that general exceptions do apply)	Link to APC patient information (if available)
Mild irritant dermatitis (contact dermatitis)	None	
Dandruff (mild scaling of the scalp without itching)	None	
Diarrhoea (adults)	None	Click here
Dry eyes / Sore tired eyes	None	Click here
Earwax	None	Click here
Excessive sweating (hyperhidrosis)	None	Click here
Head lice	None	Click here
Indigestion and Heartburn	None	Click here
Infrequent constipation	None	Click here
Infrequent migraine	None	Click here
Insect bites and stings	None	Click here
Mild acne	None	Click here
Mild dry skin	None	Click here
Mild to moderate hay fever / Seasonal rhinitis	None	Click here - hayfever
Minor burns/scalds	Note that serious burns always require professional medical attention. Burns requiring hospital A&E treatment include but are not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> all chemical and electrical burns; large or deep burns; burns causing white or charred skin; burns on the face, hands, arms, feet, legs or genitals that cause blisters. 	Click here
Minor conditions associated with pain, discomfort and/or fever (e.g. aches and sprain, headache, period pain, back pain)	None	Click here – Back pain Click here – Fever in children Click here - headache Click here – Sprains & strains
Mouth ulcers	None	Click here
Nappy rash	None	Click here

Oral thrush	None	Click here
Prevention of dental caries	None	Click here
Ringworm / athlete's foot	Lymphoedema or history of lower limb cellulitis.	Click here – athlete's foot
Sunburn due to excessive sun exposure	None	Click here
Sun protection	ACBS approved indication of photodermatoses (i.e. where skin protection should be prescribed)	Click here
Teething/mild toothache	None	Click here - teething
Threadworm	None	Click here
Travel sickness	None	Click here
Warts and verrucae	None	Click here
Fungal nail infections *	N/A	Click here
Upset stomach *	N/A	
Vaginal thrush *	N/A	Click here – Thrush in Men & Women

* These conditions are not covered in the national self-care guidance but have been classified locally as self-limiting conditions and therefore routine prescriptions for treatment should not be offered in Primary Care.

For further advice on self-care and further patient information visit: www.selfcareforum.org or www.nhs.uk

Appendix 2 – General Exceptions to Self-Care

Note that for vitamins, minerals, probiotics and those self-limiting conditions where there is limited evidence of clinical effectiveness for the treatments used (e.g. OTC items for cough, sore throat and infant colic), then the general exceptions do not apply – see [appendix 1](#).

Specific exceptions are included (if applicable) under the relevant item and/or condition in the [NHSE Guidance](#) and in [appendix 1](#).

The following are scenarios where [NHSE guidance](#) states that patients should continue to have their treatments prescribed for those conditions where general exceptions apply:

- 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.
- 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 breast-feeding. 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.