

Position Statement: Self-care with Paracetamol for Minor, Short-term Conditions

As part of its self-care strategy, in line with [National Guidance](#), NHS Nottingham & Nottinghamshire ICB does not support the routine prescribing of paracetamol in minor short-term conditions in both adults and children.

The conditions listed below are examples of where paracetamol should be purchased over-the-counter (OTC) by the patient or their carer for their own self-care with appropriate advice if required.

Fever (mild)	Headache
Acute sore throat	General aches and pains
Coughs and colds (incl. COVID-19)	Infrequent migraine
Back pain	Earache
Teething/toothache	Period pain
Sprains, strains, sporting injuries	Cuts
Self-limiting musculoskeletal pain	Bruising
Recovery after a simple medical procedure	Sinusitis / Nasal congestion

This list is not exhaustive

Prescribing is permitted for patients who take paracetamol regularly for chronic or long-term conditions.

Recommendations:

- All patients prescribed regular paracetamol for chronic or long-term conditions and have quantities of greater than 100 tablets or capsules per month should be regularly reviewed (6 to 12 monthly) to ensure that the quantity is appropriate for the individual patient. This is to help reduce stockpiling, reduce waste and to improve patient safety.
- All patients who have quantities of less than 32 on repeat prescription or who are not ordering regularly should be reviewed with a view to stopping prescribing and encouraged to buy OTC paracetamol.
- Prescribers should advise patients on safe and effective self-care measures, directing them to appropriate sources of information and patient information leaflets (e.g. [The NHS Website](#), [The Self Care Forum](#) and Notts APC leaflets for [backpain](#) and [headache](#))
- See [Notts APC overarching pain guidelines](#) for primary care prescribing advice and more information on self-care.
- 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.

Consider prescribing if:

- The patient meets one or more of the general exception criteria ([appendix 1](#)) including 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.

- The patient needs to take paracetamol regularly for a chronic or long-term condition.
- The patient is less than 3 months* old, is a baby born before 37weeks gestation, or weighs less than 4kg due to restrictions on sale of OTC paracetamol.

*Note that OTC treatment for babies aged 2-3 months is permitted for relief of fever after vaccination only (max. 2 doses).

Rationale:

The [National Guidance](#) recommends the restriction of prescribing medications for a condition that is a minor illness and is suitable for self-care and treatment with items that can easily be purchased OTC from a pharmacy and with lifestyle changes.

- Paracetamol is available to buy cheaply OTC from a pharmacy, local shop or supermarket, therefore for minor short-term conditions, prescribers should offer patients advice on safe and effective self-care measures, directing them to appropriate sources of information (e.g. [NHS website](#) and [The Self Care Forum](#)) and using patient information leaflets if appropriate.
- Community pharmacists can advise on the treatment of a wide range of minor short-term conditions.
- Patients should be encouraged to keep a **small** supply (no more than 32 tablets) of paracetamol in their own medicine cabinet so they are able to manage minor short-term conditions at home without the need for a GP appointment.

Any patient queries or complaints should be directed to the Patient Experience Team on 0115 883 9570 or email nnicb-nn.patientexperience@nhs.net.

Reference:

NHS England, NHS Clinical Commissioners. Conditions for which over the counter items should not routinely be prescribed in Primary Care

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/policy-guidance-conditions-for-which-over-the-counter-items-should-not-be-routinely-prescribed-in-primary-care/> (accessed June 2023)

Appendix 1 – General Exceptions to Self-Care

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 OTC medicines).
- For those patients that have symptoms that suggest the condition is not minor, i.e. those with red flag symptoms (e.g. 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.