

Appendix 2: Conditions for which over the counter (OTC) items should not be routinely prescribed in Primary Care. The rationale and recommendations from the NHSE consultation, exceptions and referral criteria.

Self-limiting condition	Recommendations	Rationale	Referral may be required ^{1,2,3} :
Acute sore throat	Prescription for treatment should not be routinely offered as the condition is self-limiting and will clear up on its own without the need for treatment.	A sore throat due to a viral or bacterial cause is a self-limiting condition. Symptoms resolve within 3 days in 40% of people, and within 1 week in 85% of people, irrespective of whether or not the sore throat is due to a streptococcal infection. There is little evidence to suggest that treatments such as lozenges or throat sprays help to treat the cause of sore throat and patients should be advised to take simple painkillers and implement some self-care measures such as gargling with warm salty water instead.	Sore throat that doesn't get better after 10-14 days. Persistent high fever for more than 3 days. Trouble breathing, drooling with swallowing difficulties, pain that does not respond to OTC pain relief, Patients who are immunocompromised.
Conjunctivitis	Prescription for treatment should not be routinely offered as the condition is self-limiting and will clear up on its own without the need for treatment.	Treatments for conjunctivitis can be purchased over the counter however almost half of all simple cases of conjunctivitis clear up within 10 days without any treatment. Public Health England (PHE) advises that children with infective conjunctivitis do not need to be excluded from school, nursery or child minders, and it does not state any requirement for treatment with topical antibiotics.	Children under 2 years of age. Symptoms not resolved after 14 days. Sensitivity to light or changes in vision. Pain in the eye. Intense redness in one or both eye(s).
Coughs and colds, and nasal congestion	Prescription for treatment should not be routinely offered as the condition is self-limiting and will clear up on its own without the need for treatment.	Most colds start to improve in 7 to 10 days. Most coughs clear up within two to three weeks. Both conditions can cause nasal congestion. Neither condition requires any treatment.	Temperature 39° or above, thick, blood stained mucus, difficult to breath, symptoms last longer than 3 weeks.
Cradle cap	Prescription for treatment should not be routinely offered as the condition is self-limiting and will clear up on its own without the need for treatment.	Cradle cap is harmless and doesn't usually itch or cause discomfort. It usually appears in babies in the first two months of their lives, and clears up without treatment within weeks to a few months.	If causing distress to the infant and not improving

Dandruff (mild scaling of the scalp without itching)	Prescriptions for treatment should not be routinely offered as the condition is appropriate for self-care.	Dandruff isn't contagious or harmful and can be easily treated with OTC anti-fungal shampoos.	Severe or itchy dandruff, red swollen scalp. Immunosuppressed patients
Diarrhoea (adults)	Prescriptions for treatment should not be routinely offered as the condition is appropriate for self-care.	Acute diarrhoea is usually caused by a bacterial or viral infection and other causes include drugs, anxiety or a food allergy. Oral rehydration salts can be bought OTC and can help replace lost fluids. Medication to reduce bowel motions should not be used if infective diarrhoea is suspected. 4	Recurrent diarrhoea, bloody or dark in colour. Recent weight loss. Recent antibiotics or hospital admission.
Dry eyes/Sore tired eyes	Prescriptions for treatment should not be routinely offered as the condition is appropriate for self-care.	Patients should be encouraged to manage both dry eyes and sore eyes by implementing some self-care measures such as good eyelid hygiene and avoidance of environmental factors alongside treatment using lubricant eye treatments that consist of a range of drops, gels and ointments that can be easily be purchased OTC	Very painful or red eyes, sensitivity to light, changes in vision.
Earwax	Prescriptions for treatment should not be routinely offered as the condition is appropriate for self-care.	Earwax is produced inside ears to keep them clean and free of germs. It usually passes out of the ears harmlessly, but sometimes too much can build up and block the ears. A build-up of earwax is a common problem that can often be treated using either olive oil or eardrops bought from a pharmacy. These can help soften the earwax so that it falls out naturally.	If wax is still present after 2 weeks' worth of continuous days of drops. Unresolving hearing loss. Pain.
Excessive sweating (hyperhidrosis)	Prescriptions for treatment should not be routinely offered as the condition is appropriate for self-care.	First line treatment involves simple lifestyle changes. It can also be treated with OTC high strength antiperspirants. An antiperspirant containing aluminium chloride is usually the first line of treatment purchased from a pharmacy.	Symptoms have lasted longer than 6 months. Disrupts daily activities. Night sweats. Family history.
Haemorrhoids	Prescription for treatment should not be routinely offered as the condition is self-limiting and will clear up on its own without the need for treatment.	Haemorrhoids often clear up by themselves after a few days. Making simple dietary changes and not straining on the toilet are often recommended first.	Persistent or recurrent. Rectal bleeding.

Head lice	Prescriptions for treatment should not be routinely offered as the condition is appropriate for self-care.	Head lice are a common problem, particularly in school children aged 4-11 years of age. Live head lice can be treated by wet combing; chemical treatment is only recommended in exceptional circumstances and in these cases OTC medicines can be purchased from a pharmacy. If appropriate, everyone in the household needs to be treated at the same time even if they don't have symptoms. Further information on how to treat head lice without medication can be found on NHS Choices.	N/A
Infant colic	Prescription for treatment should not be routinely offered as the condition is self-limiting and will clear up on its own without the need for treatment.	Medical treatment not usually recommended. There are some OTC treatments available that could be tried however; there is limited evidence for the effectiveness of these treatments.	N/A
Infrequent cold sore of lips	Prescription for treatment should not be routinely offered as the condition is self-limiting and will clear up on its own without the need for treatment.	Cold sores caused by the herpes simplex virus usually clear up without treatment within 7 to 10 days. Antiviral creams are available OTC from pharmacies without a prescription and if used correctly, these can help ease symptoms and speed up the healing time. To be effective, these treatments should be applied as soon as the first signs of a cold sore appear. Using an antiviral cream after this initial period is unlikely to have much of an effect.	Sores inside the mouth. Still present after 10 days. Pregnant or immunocompromised.
Indigestion and heartburn	Prescriptions for treatment should not be routinely offered as the condition is appropriate for self-care.	Most people have indigestion at some point. Usually, it's not a sign of anything more serious and can be treated at home without the need for medical advice, as it's often mild and infrequent and specialist treatment isn't required. Most people are able to manage their indigestion by making simple diet and lifestyle changes, or taking medication such as antacids.	Persistent symptoms not responding to treatment, severe pain for longer than 3 weeks in upper abdomen, vomiting (\pm blood), change in stools (colour/consistency). Night sweats, weight loss.

Infrequent constipation	Prescriptions for treatment should not be routinely offered as the condition is appropriate for self-care.	This guidance applies to short term, infrequent constipation caused by changes in lifestyle or diet such as lack of water or movement or changes in diet. It can be effectively managed with a change in diet or lifestyle. Pharmacists can help if diet and lifestyle changes aren't helping. They can suggest an OTC laxative. Most laxatives work within 3 days. They should only be used for a short time only.	Symptoms have consistently lasted longer than 6 weeks. Taking medication which can cause constipation. Swollen, tummy with vomiting (URGENT referral as may be a blockage). Blood in stools. Weight loss, night sweats. Laxatives in children are not recommended unless prescribed by a Clinician.
Infrequent migraine	Prescriptions for treatment should not be routinely offered as the condition is appropriate for self-care.	Mild infrequent migraines can be adequately treated with OTC pain killers and a number of combination medicines for migraine are available that contain both painkillers and anti-sickness medicines. Frequent use of painkillers can induce migraines	OTC medication does not control symptoms. Severe migraine. Increased frequency, sudden onset, fever, sudden change in sensations and speech.
Insect bites/stings	Prescriptions for treatment should not be routinely offered as the condition is appropriate for self-care.	OTC treatments can help ease symptoms, such as painkillers, creams for itching and antihistamines.	Symptoms not improving after a couple of days. Bites or stings in/near mouth or eyes. Enlarging red swollen area surrounding bite/sting, with or without pain and pus, flu-like symptoms.
Mild cystitis	Prescription for treatment should not be routinely offered as the condition is self-limiting and will clear up on its own without the need for treatment.	Mild cases can be defined as those that are responsive to symptomatic treatment but will also clear up on their own. If symptoms don't improve in 3 days, despite self-care measures, then the patient should be advised to see their GP. Symptomatic treatment using products that reduce the acidity of the urine to reduce symptoms are available, but there's a lack of evidence to suggest they're effective.	Children, men and pregnant women. No improvement after a couple of days, or deterioration in symptoms to include fever, blood in urine, pain in side. Frequent cystitis symptoms.

Mild irritant dermatitis	Prescriptions for treatment should not be routinely offered as the condition is appropriate for self-care.	Irritant dermatitis is a type of eczema triggered by contact with a particular substance. Once treated most people can expect their symptoms to improve and/or clear up completely if the irritant or allergen can be identified and removed or avoided. It is most commonly caused by irritants such as soaps, fabric softeners, washing powders, detergents, solvents or regular contact with water. Treatment normally involves avoiding the allergen or irritant and treating symptoms with emollients and topical corticosteroids.	Cracking, weeping and painful skin with or without blistering may be a sign of infection. Widespread over larger areas of the body. If quality of life or sleep are affected.
Mild acne	Prescriptions for treatment should not be routinely offered as the condition is appropriate for self-care.	Patients should be encouraged to manage mild acne with long term use of OTC products.	Severe painful spots that may cause distress and affect social situations. Scarring apparent despite treatment.
Mild dry skin	Prescriptions for treatment should not be routinely offered as the condition is appropriate for self-care.	Emollients are often used to help manage dry, itchy or scaly skin conditions. Patients with mild dry skin can be successfully managed using OTC products on a long term basis.	N/A
Mild to moderate hay fever/ seasonal rhinitis	Prescriptions for treatment should not be routinely offered as the condition is appropriate for self-care.	Hay fever is a common allergic condition that affects up to one in five people. There's currently no cure for hay fever, but most people with mild to moderate symptoms are able to relieve symptoms with OTC treatments recommended by a pharmacist.	Symptoms not improving with OTC medication. Pregnant/breastfeeding
Minor burns/scalds	Prescriptions for treatment should not be routinely offered as the condition is appropriate for self-care.	Depending on how serious a burn is, it is possible to treat burns at home. Antiseptic creams and treatments for burns should be included in any products kept in a medicine cabinet at home.	More serious burns always require professional medical attention. Burns requiring hospital A&E treatment include but are not limited to: chemical and electrical burns, large or deep burns, burns that cause white/charred skin, burns on face, hands, feet, legs or genitals that cause blisters

Minor conditions associated with pain, discomfort and/or fever (e.g. aches and sprain, headache, period pain, back pain)	Prescriptions for treatment should not be routinely offered as the condition is appropriate for self-care.	Patients should be encouraged to keep a small supply of OTC analgesics in their medicines cabinets at home so they are able to manage minor conditions at home without the need for a GP appointment.	Severe symptoms not controlled with OTC medication.
Mouth ulcers	Prescriptions for treatment should not be routinely offered as the condition is appropriate for self-care.	Mouth ulcers are common and can usually be managed at home, without seeing your dentist or GP. However, OTC treatment can help to reduce swelling and ease any discomfort.	Last longer than 3 weeks. Recurrent mouth ulcers,
Nappy rash	Prescriptions for treatment should not be routinely offered as the condition is appropriate for self-care.	Up to a third of babies and toddlers in nappies have nappy rash at any one time. Nappy rash can usually be treated at home using barrier creams purchased at the supermarket or pharmacy.	If the rash doesn't go away or the baby develops a persistent bright red, moist rash with white or red pimples that spreads into the folds of their skin.
Oral thrush	Prescriptions for treatment should not be routinely offered as the condition is appropriate for self-care.	Oral thrush is a minor condition that can be treated without the need for a GP consultation or prescription in the first instance. It can be easily treated with OTC gel. Milk residue can be differentiated from thrush as it can be scraped off the tongue with ease whereas thrush cannot. ³	Patients taking warfarin should not take OTC Daktarin oral gel. Babies. Persistent symptoms that do not resolve with treatment. Immunocompromised.
Prevention of dental caries	Prescriptions for treatment should not be routinely offered as the condition is appropriate for self-care.	The dentist may advise on using higher-strength fluoride toothpaste if you are particularly at risk of tooth decay. Some higher fluoride toothpastes (~1500 ppm) and mouthwashes can be purchased OTC	N/A
Probiotics	Should not be routinely prescribed due to Limited evidence of clinical effectiveness.	Insufficient clinical evidence	ACBS approved indications

Ringworm/ athletes foot	Prescriptions for treatment should not be routinely offered as the condition is appropriate for self-care.	Ringworm is a common fungal infection that can cause a red or silvery ring-like rash on the skin. Athlete's foot is a rash caused by a fungus that usually appears between the toes. These fungal infections, medically known as "tinea", are not serious and are usually easily treated with OTC treatments.	No improvement after 2 weeks treatment with OTC cream. Immunocompromised patients. Diabetic patients with athletes foot. Symptoms or history of cellulitis and/or lymphedema
Sunburn due to excessive sun exposure	Prescriptions for treatment should not be routinely offered as the condition is appropriate for self-care.	Most people manage sun burn symptoms themselves or prevent symptoms developing, using sun protection, by using products that can easily be bought in a pharmacy or supermarket.	Severe symptoms including blistering or swelling of the skin. Fever, chills, signs of heat exhaustion.
Sun protection	Prescriptions for treatment should not be routinely offered as the condition is appropriate for self-care.	Most people manage sun burn symptoms themselves or prevent symptoms developing, using sun protection, by using products that can easily be bought in a pharmacy or supermarket.	N/A
Teething/mild toothache	Prescriptions for treatment should not be routinely offered as the condition is appropriate for self-care.	Teething gels often contain a mild local anaesthetic, which helps to numb any pain or discomfort caused by teething and these can be purchased from a pharmacy. If baby is in pain or has a mild raised temperature (less than 38C) then paracetamol or ibuprofen suspension can be given. Toothache can come and go or be constant. Eating or drinking can make the pain worse, particularly if the food or drink is hot or cold. Mild toothache in adults can also be treated with OTC painkillers whilst awaiting a dental appointment for further investigation.	N/A
Threadworm	Prescriptions for treatment should not be routinely offered as the condition is appropriate for self-care.	Threadworms (pinworms) are tiny worms in your stools. They are common in children and can be spread easily. They can be effectively treated without the need to visit the GP. Treatment for threadworms can easily be bought from pharmacies. This is usually a chewable tablet or liquid you swallow. Strict hygiene measures can also help clear up a threadworm infection and reduce the likelihood of reinfection. Everyone in the household will require treatment, even if they don't have symptoms.	Pregnant or breast feeding women, Children under 2 years of age.

Travel sickness	Prescriptions for treatment should not be routinely offered as the condition is appropriate for self-care.	Mild motion sickness can be treated by various self-care measures (e.g. stare at a fixed object, fresh air, listen to music etc.); more severe motion sickness can be treated with OTC medicines.	N/A
Vitamins and minerals	Should not be routinely prescribed due to limited evidence of clinical effectiveness.	Essential nutrients which most people can get from eating a healthy balanced diet. Vitamin D supplementation is recommended to all over the winter months and for high risk groups (list) all year round.	1. Medically diagnosed deficiency including lifelong or chronic condition/following surgery (review on regular basis) 2. Calcium/Vit D for osteoporosis. 3. Malnutrition including alcoholism. 4. Vitamin D analogues. NB maintenance/prevention should be bought OTC
Warts and verrucae	Prescriptions for treatment should not be routinely offered as the condition is appropriate for self-care.	Most people will have warts at some point in their life. They are generally harmless and tend to go away on their own eventually. Several treatments can be purchased from a pharmacy to get rid of warts and verrucae more quickly if patients require treatment.	Warts on face, or genitals. Recurrent or very large or painful warts/verrucae. Warts that bleed or change appearance.

The following conditions are not covered in the national guidance, however as part of its self-care strategy, NHS Nottingham North and East, NHS Nottingham West, NHS Rushcliffe and NHS Nottingham City have classified them as self-limiting conditions and therefore routine prescriptions for treatment should not be offered.

Self-Limiting Condition	Rationale	Referral criteria/ Exceptions
Fungal nail infections	Topical antifungal therapy offers very little benefit for the management of fungal nail infections. There is limited evidence for efficacy in dermatophyte infections and therefore they should not be prescribed. All topical products are low priority or non-formulary.	If more than two nails are affected. Immunocompromised/ diabetic patients. If OTC treatment hasn't worked – patients should be advised that OTC treatment can take up to 12 months.
Upset stomach	Common causes of sickness includes: gastroenteritis, norovirus, food poisoning or infections picked up whilst travelling abroad. Vomiting usually lasts 1 to 2 days and can usually be treated at home by increasing fluid intake. Oral rehydration sachets can be taken if there are signs of dehydration	Symptoms of dehydration persist even after taking rehydration sachets. Symptoms of dehydration in a baby. Constant vomiting – not able to keep fluids down. Persistent vomiting that lasts for longer than 2 days.

Vaginal thrush	<p>Thrush is a common yeast infection that affects men and women. You can buy antifungal medicine from pharmacies if you've had thrush diagnosed in the past and you know the symptoms. This can be a tablet you take, a tablet you insert into your vagina (pessary) or a cream to relieve the irritation. Symptoms should clear up within a week, after one dose of medicine or using the cream daily. You don't need to treat partners, unless they have symptoms.</p>	<p>Thrush symptoms occurring for the first time. Infection has occurred more than twice in the last six months. Under 16 or over 60 years old. Pregnancy or breast feeding. Immunocompromised patients. OTC treatment has not worked.</p>
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References:

1. NHS England, NHS Clinical Commissioners. Conditions for which over the counter items should not routinely be prescribed in Primary Care: Guidance for CCGs.
<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/conditions-for-which-over-the-counter-items-should-not-routinely-be-prescribed-in-primary-care-guidance-for-ccgs/> (accessed April 2018)
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3. The Self Care Forum: <http://www.selfcareforum.org/> (Accessed April 2018)
4. Antimicrobial Prescribing Guidelines for Primary Care 2017
<http://www.nottsapc.nhs.uk/media/1044/antimicrobial-guidelines.pdf> (Accessed May 2018)
5. Clinical Knowledge Summaries <https://cks.nice.org.uk/headache-medicationoveruse#!scenario> (Accessed May 2018)