

Advice on management of common illnesses & accidents

These notes are for guidance only; should patients or their relatives be sufficiently anxious about a complaint because of its severity, persistence or failure to respond to appropriate measures, they should, of course, contact the surgery for further advice.

Minor illnesses

Many of you treat your own illnesses-coughs, colds, diarrhoea, aches and pains – by going to the chemist for medicines. We think this correct and by doing this you will leave the practice team free to cope with more serious problems.

Chemists are experts on minor illnesses and know about appropriate remedies. Consult the chemist first but if your symptoms persist then contact your own doctor.

Many minor illnesses get better without treatment. All you often need is some reassurance that what you have is indeed truly minor and advice about what to do until it gets better. Pills and medicine are often completely unnecessary. Be prepared to leave the health centre without a prescription.

Accidents

Childhood accidents are a major cause of concern. Many can be prevented by simple measures to make your home a safer place. Particular danger areas are: unguarded fires and unattended cookers, Trailing kettle or iron leads, electric sockets (covers cost a few pence), stairs without gates and bedroom windows. Tablets, medicines and household chemicals left accessible cause many accidents. Don't let children play near busy roads, on building sites or near water. Teach your child to behave safely on the roads and take him/her to swimming lessons.

Children are naturally adventurous and don't always think before they act. Simple precautions make them safer.

Diarrhoea

Many attacks are caused by virus or bacterial infections, which usually get better after 2-3 days. Avoid solid food for 24 hours and drink plenty of clear fluids (water or squash). If the diarrhoea is not beginning to settle after 24 hours or there is continuous stomach pain then consult your doctor.

Nose bleeds

Sit on a chair (leaning forward with your mouth open) and pinch your nose just below the bone for about 10 minutes, by which time the bleeding should have stopped. Avoid hot drinks or food for 24 hours. If the bleeding doesn't stop then consult your doctor.

Sore throats

Most sore throats are caused by virus infection so cannot be cured with antibiotics. These sore throats usually get better within 5 days and only need simple remedies such as paracetamol or soluble aspirin and plenty of fluids. If the sore throat is getting worse after 2 days, if there is earache or the temperature is over 39.5 C then you should see the doctor.

Vomiting

Virus infection or eating or drinking too much may cause this. It usually stops within 24 hours without treatment. Eat nothing for 24 hours; drink frequently small amounts of water. As the stomach settles slowly return to a normal diet over 2-3 days. Consult the doctor if there is continuous stomach pain, the vomiting lasts more than 24 hours or in a child with a temperature of over 38C.

Healthy lifestyle

Sadly heart disease is a common cause of deaths, some of which could be prevented by adopting a healthier lifestyle.

Here are some suggestions:

1. Don't smoke (There is no safe level)
2. Take regular exercise (30 minutes 2-3 times a week)
3. Avoid fatty and fried food
4. Keep your weight to normal limits. The practice nurse will tell you what this should be.
5. Limit your alcohol intake (10 pints of beer a week for men, 7 pints for women and not all in one go!)
6. Find ways of avoiding or coping better with stress- relax!

Back trouble

Back trouble causes a lot of misery and time off work but can be prevented in many cases. Never lift heavy objects with your back bent. Get help moving heavy objects. If a load can be split do so. Lift things by holding them close to your chest, never at arms length. Try and sit and standing a good posture with your back as straight as possible and the chair adjusted to an upright position, this also applies to driving If you are doing unusually heavy work e.g. digging the garden, do it in small bits resting in between. Take up some regular exercise to keep your back supple e.g. swimming.

Burns and scalds

Apply large amounts of cold water to the affected area as soon as possible and maintain this until the pain subsides. This may be as long as 15 minutes. If the burn causes severe blistering or the skin is broken, the doctor should be consulted. Avoiding long exposure to the sun and covering exposed areas adequately should prevent sunburn. It may be treated with calamine lotion and soluble aspirin to relieve the pain
(Children under 12 years should be given paracetamol)

Colds

There is no cure for the common cold! A typical cold starts with a mild temperature (37.5 to 38 C) after a day or two the nose starts running with a clear liquid changing after 3-4 days to a thick yellow discharge. The whole illness lasts 7 to 10 days. Take paracetamol or soluble aspirin and drink plenty of fluids. To help relieve the discharge, inhale the steam from menthol crystals or vapour rub, dissolved in hot water. Cough medicines have little effect on the common cold.

Coughs

During a cold, coughing prevents mucus from entering the air passages and causing infection. To suppress this reflex with cough mixtures can do more harm than good. The best treatment is steam inhalation with menthol crystals or vapour rub. Consult your doctor if coughing lasts more than 10 days after the cold has cleared up: or if it produces green or yellow spit: or breathing causes pain or there is shortness of breath: if coughing produces blood