

Prescribing of 'self-care' products: Questions and answers

What changes have been made in relation to the prescribing of self-care products?

The NHS clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) in Chorley, South Ribble and Greater Preston support GP practices in promoting self-care.

Self-care is a term used to include all the actions taken by people to recognise, treat, protect their own health, choosing appropriate treatments to manage illnesses and/or long term conditions.

Unless a patient meets a particular exemption, the CCGs have decided to stop funding prescriptions for a range of products that are classed as 'low priority'.

This will be because they are readily available over the counter in pharmacies and on the shelves in supermarkets, and includes:

- Treatments for minor ailments, including medicines like paracetamol, ibuprofen, head lice lotion and indigestion tablets.
- Treatments where there is little evidence that they have a real clinical benefit, including cough syrups, nasal congestion sprays, sore throat products and vitamin supplements.

To make sure that NHS resources are used widely, it has been agreed that only those treatments that are clinically effective and provide a clear health benefit to patients should be prescribed on NHS prescriptions.

Why have the changes been made to stop prescribing these products?

For some of the products there is not much clinical evidence that they are effective in treating minor illnesses or their symptoms, and for all of the products they are readily available in shops and supermarkets.

As local clinical commissioning groups, we have a responsibility to use public resources in an efficient way, that is 'value for money' for the tax payer, and it is expected that the local NHS will be able to save around £700,000 a year by making these changes.

I have a long term condition and because of that I experience on-going chronic pain. How will I get the amount pain medication I need when there are restrictions for over the counter purchasing?

It is likely that your GP will still be able to prescribe you those products, as you will probably still be eligible to receive these prescriptions because of your long term condition and pain management needs.

Which patients will be 'exempt' and will still be able to receive these types of products on prescriptions?

Your GP will use the policy to determine if you are exempt or not. The exemptions depend on the individual product or type of medication, but there are some exemptions for the following people:

- People with long term conditions and pain management needs
- Babies
- Children
- Pregnant women
- Breastfeeding mothers
- Patients being care for at the end of their life

What is the full list of the types of products that will not routinely prescribed going forward?

- Pain killers for acute minor aches and pains, including migraine
- Management of coughs and colds, blocked nose, sore throat, including decongestants, nasal drops and inhalations
- Treatments for non-serious diarrhoea
- Antihistamines and allergy preparations for non-serious stings and insectbites
- Treatment of head lice infestation using head lice lotions and shampoos
- Treatments of occasional indigestion and heartburn, including that resulting from over-indulgence
- Treatments for oral or vaginal thrush
- Antiperspirants for excess sweating
- Athlete's foot creams and powders
- Barrier creams and treatments for non-infected, unbroken nappy rash
- Creams for the removal of female facial hair
- Cream and gels for mild acne
- Ear wax removers and softeners
- Soya based formula milks
- Hay fever preparations, including eye drops for allergies
- Lozenges, throat sprays, mouthwashes and gargles, including treatments for mouth ulcers
- Moisturisers and bath additives for minor dry skin conditions
- Treatments for skin rashes, including mild-moderate eczema
- Treatments for threadworm
- Tonics, vitamins and minerals supplements, herbal and complementary remedies
- Antifungal nail paint
- Cold sore treatments
- Treatments for eye infections, including uncomplicated conjunctivitis
- Sun creams / lotions
- Teething gels
- Treatments for infant colic
- Fluoride toothpastes
- Warts and verrucae treatments

What if I don't currently pay for prescriptions and can't afford this change?

Most of the products are available readily at a reasonable price, particularly if they are pharmacy and supermarket 'own brand' versions of the products.

You may also be able to access support from the local minor ailments 'pharmacy first' scheme, which your GP can tell you more about.

Where can I get the listed medications from if not from my GP?

Many of the medications are available from the high street or from supermarkets. Pain killers can be bought from as little as 20 pence and other medications can be bought for less than the cost of a prescription.

Where can I get advice or support about self-care and appropriate medicines?

You can find a wealth of information about self-care on the NHS Choices website. Visit the site and search 'live well' or 'self-care': www.nhs.uk.

You should also make the most of your local pharmacist, who will be very knowledgeable about ways to treat your minor illness or symptoms. You do not need to make an appointment to speak to your pharmacist. Many pharmacies are open in the evenings and at weekends. Any consultation you have with the pharmacist will be confidential and discrete, in a private area of the pharmacy.

