



MANAGING YOUR MINOR AILMENTS EFFECTIVELY

Have you ever suffered from any of the following?

- Cold and flu
- Cough and sore throat
- Headache
- Hay fever
- Indigestion
- Minor aches and pains
- Diarrhoea / constipation
- Cold sores

These are just a few examples of the every day aches and ills which we suffer from time to time, which are not necessarily serious or long lasting or require a doctor's attention. They are sometimes described as minor ailments.

If you were suffering from a so-called minor ailment, would you know

- Where to get advice on how to treat it?
- That there may be a medicine that you can buy without a prescription which could relieve your symptoms?
- If you should see your doctor?

For more information, read on!

Caution

Any so-called minor ailment has the potential to become serious if the symptoms are severe or last for a long time and in these circumstances, it is recommended that you see your doctor.

Getting advice

When we're not feeling well, we often turn to our friends and family for advice. Sometimes, this is not the best course of action as the treatments which suited them may not be right for you.

Health columns in magazines and newspapers are also a useful source of advice about minor ailments and their treatment.

However they may not have all the answers you need.

When you are unwell, the first thing you need to do is find out what is wrong and then what can be done to make you feel better.

Your pharmacist will be able to advise you and recommend a medicine if appropriate.

As well as being experts on medicines, pharmacists are also trained to recognize and treat minor ailments and give healthcare advice.

If your pharmacist thinks you need to see your doctor, he or she will tell you so.

If you have picked a particular non-prescription medicine yourself, it is important to check that it is suitable for you by reading the label. If you are unsure about anything on the label, check with your pharmacist.

Things to tell your pharmacist

To help your pharmacist give you the best possible advice, make sure you tell him or her:

- What your symptoms are
- How long they have lasted
- If you have tried any other treatments already (including any herbal or homeopathic remedies)

Don't forget to tell your pharmacist if:

- You are allergic to any medicines
- You are pregnant or breastfeeding
- You are being treated for any other condition.
This is especially important if you are taking warfarin or being treated for:
 - High blood pressure
 - Heart disease
 - Diabetes
 - Asthma
 - Stomach ulcer
 - Depression
 - Thyroid disease
 - Prostate disease
 - Glaucoma
 - Kidney or liver disease

The reason why your pharmacist needs this information is that some non-prescription medicines should be avoided if you are suffering from certain conditions. In addition, some medicines can interact with each other so the pharmacist needs to know about all the medicines you are taking.

Treating minor ailments

Most minor ailments can be successfully managed with non-prescription medicines. Many medicines which were previously prescription-only are now available from your pharmacist without a prescription.

Also known as over-the-counter or OTC medicines, non-prescription medicines generally provide temporary relief of minor symptoms. A good example would be a cold remedy. Some OTC medicines can cure ailments like Athlete's Foot or with a doctor's guidance, help manage recurring conditions like eczema and thrush.

Following is a list of minor ailments, their symptoms and suggested remedies. This list is not exhaustive and is provided for general information only. If you are unsure about what is wrong with you or whether a particular medicine is suitable for you, ask your pharmacist or doctor.

Minor Ailment	Symptoms	Remedies
Cold and flu*	<p>Sneezing Blocked or runny nose Fever and headache General aches and pains</p> <p><i>*The symptoms of flu are more pronounced than those of a cold and include the following: high fever, muscular aches and pains, severe headache, exhaustion, loss of appetite and sudden onset (within 12 hours)</i></p>	Take a decongestant tablet or use a decongestant spray to unblock the nose. Take an anti-histamine to dry up a runny nose. Take a pain reliever for aches and pains and to reduce temperature (see below)
Cough	Coughing – usually either a dry / tickly cough or a chesty / productive cough.	Take a cough mixture: an expectorant in the case of a chesty cough to help loosen up the phlegm or a cough reliever / linctus to stop the cough in the case of a dry ticklish cough with no phlegm.
Sore throat	Pain and inflammation	Use lozenges or a throat spray containing anti-bacterials and/or anaesthetics to relieve the pain. Gargle with aspirin or a liquid antiseptic.
Minor aches and pain Headache Toothache Period pain Rheumatic and muscular pains Backache	Pain	<p>Take a pain reliever (i.e. an analgesic)</p> <p>2 types:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-steroidal inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as aspirin and ibuprofen • Paracetamol <p>Pain relievers may also contain codeine or caffeine for increased effect. Certain NSAIDs are available in a gel for muscular aches and pains.</p>
Indigestion	Stomach ache Heartburn Nausea Belching Bloating	Take an antacid to reduce excess acid in the stomach or an acid suppressant (H2 antagonist) which stops excess acid being formed. <i>Avoid excessive amount</i>

		<i>of rich and spicy food and alcohol and eating late at night</i>
Diarrhoea	Loose and frequent bowel movements Cramps <i>If prolonged or motions are bloody, see your doctor</i>	Use oral rehydration powders (which are taken as a drink) to replace lost fluids and minerals. Take an anti-diarrhoeal containing loperamide to stop the diarrhoea.
Constipation	Infrequent bowel movements <i>If prolonged, seek medical advice</i>	Take a fibre substitute / laxative to stimulate bowel movements. <i>Increase fibre content of diet and drink more fluid – helps to prevent constipation.</i>
Hayfever	Sneezing Runny or stuffy nose Watery eyes Headache	Take an anti-histamine to relieve the symptoms of hay fever especially sneezing and watery eyes. Use azelastine, corticosteroid or sodium cromoglycate spray to prevent and treat hay fever. <i>Avoid pollen</i>
Acne	Spots, whiteheads, blackheads	Apply a product containing benzoyl peroxide to treat spots. Wash frequently with medicated soaps and scrubs.
Contact dermatitis / allergic skin reactions	Red dry scaly skin	Apply or wash with emollient or oily preparations to moisturize and soften the skin. Use 1% hydrocortisone cream or ointment to reduce inflammation
Cold sores	Itching, tingling, burning sensation and sores on/around lips If prolonged, seek medical advice	Apply an antiviral cream containing aciclovir to treat the viral infection which causes the cold sore.
Athlete's Foot	Itchy sore sensation between toes, cracking and peeling	Apply a cream or ointment containing clotrimazole or miconazole or tolfanate to treat the fungal infection which causes Athlete's Foot. <i>Wash feet frequently and dry thoroughly as damp conditions encourage the fungal infection further.</i>
Dandruff	White flakes on hair / clothes	Use a medicated shampoo containing coal tar, ketoconazole or selenium which help to treat dandruff. <i>Wash hair frequently.</i>
Vaginal thrush <i>Should be initially diagnosed by a GP</i>	White vaginal discharge Itching/burning sensation	Use a vaginal cream and/or pessaries containing clotrimazole to treat the fungal infection which causes thrush.
Cystitis	Burning sensation on passing	Use a preparation containing

<i>Should be initially diagnosed by a GP</i>	urine, frequency. <i>If accompanied by back pain or fever, see your doctor</i>	sodium citrate, potassium citrate or sodium bicarbonate to make the urine less acidic. <i>Increase fluid intake and do not delay going to the toilet.</i>
Piles (also known as haemorrhoids)	Swelling on blood vessels inside back passage – itching, pain. <i>If there is any blood, see your doctor</i>	Use an ointment, cream and/or suppositories containing soothing agents, local anaesthetics and/or hydrocortisone to reduce pain and swelling
Baldness	Loss of hair	Apply a lotion containing minoxidil which helps to stimulate hair growth

Taking your medicine correctly

Before taking your medicine, always read the label and the leaflet in the pack carefully.

Information on the label includes:

- The product name and what it is used for
- The name and quantity of each active ingredient
- Instructions on how to take the medicine and how much to take
- The expiry date – when to dispose of the medicine
- If relevant, special storage instructions. Some medicines have to be stored in the fridge
- A list of excipients having a recognized action or effect. Excipients are ingredients other than drugs in medicines, e.g. colouring agents, preservatives, binding agents.

If you are intolerant to substances such as lactose and gluten, be aware that these may be included in tablets and will be listed on the label.

The label also includes:

- Details of the manufacturer
- A product authorization number (e.g. PA 333/2/1) – this is the number of the licence granted by the Irish Medicines Board to allow the product to be sold in Ireland. To obtain a product authorization, the manufacturer must prove that the medicine does what it claims to do, is safe and is manufactured to the highest standards of quality.

The leaflet in the pack contains the following additional information:

- Details of how the medicine works
- Things to look out for before taking the medicine, e.g. if you are suffering from a particular condition, it may not be appropriate for you
- Special warnings, e.g. do not drive or do not take with alcohol in the case of a medicine which may cause drowsiness

- Details of interactions. Interactions can happen when you mix certain medicines with food, alcohol or other medicines making medicines less effective or perhaps even harmful to you
- Further information on how to take the medicine correctly including:

What to do if you forget to take a dose

What to do if you take too much

Things to watch out for

Sometimes when taking medicines, things we don't expect to see can happen. That's the time to talk to your pharmacist or doctor. Here are examples of the signs to watch for:

- Skin rashes or itchiness
- Difficulty breathing
- Unusual headache or dizziness
- Unexplained or easy bruising
- Mood changes
- A loss of appetite, nausea or vomiting
- Slurred speech, memory loss or impaired judgement
- Changes in sleeping patterns such as unusual drowsiness or recurring unpleasant dreams

There is the possibility that these symptoms may be the result of the medication, but they could be connected to other causes. In any case, contact your doctor or pharmacist immediately.

Keep it safe

- Keep your medicine in a cool dry place, out of sunlight.
- Don't keep your medicines in the bathroom. The heat and moisture could damage them.
- Don't hoard medicines, unless they are part of your family first aid kit.
- Never use outdated medicines and always dispose of them carefully
- Store your medicine in its original container and do not repack it
- Never use the medicine if you see any signs of tampering in the pack or if the medicine looks discoloured or odd in any way.

Keep all medicines, including seemingly harmless medications like cough bottles, safely locked away and out of reach of children. No packaging is totally safe and many children can open bottles fitted with child-resistant containers.

When to consult your doctor

There are times when it is better to consult your doctor rather than trying to treat a minor ailment yourself.

On occasion, symptoms may be caused by a more serious underlying condition and your doctor will be able to spot this. Sometimes, you may need a treatment that is only available on prescription.

It is important that you seek your doctor's advice if:

- Your symptoms are severe and/or have lasted for a prolonged period.
- You have tried non-prescription medicines and they haven't worked
- You are experiencing an ailment such as thrush or cystitis for the first time
- Your symptoms are accompanied by a sudden loss in weight or by a general feeling of unwellness
- There is a sudden change in your bowel habits
- You suddenly begin to experience chronic heartburn and are aged 40 or under
- You are diabetic and suffering from foot problems or mouth ulcers
- You cough up green/yellow phlegm or blood

If you are unsure about whether or not to see your doctor, your pharmacist will be able to guide you.

Avoid the incorrect use of medicines

Modern medicines are safe if used properly – this means taking the right dose at the right time and in the right way.

Non-prescription medicines can be harmful if taken incorrectly. If taken for long periods of time or in amounts greater than the package instructions advise, they could hide a more serious condition, minimize the effect of a prescription medicine or cause poisoning.

To avoid any problems with your medicines:

- Check that the medicine is suitable before you buy it by reading the label or asking your pharmacist or doctor.
- Always follow the instructions on the label and the patient information leaflet.
- Do not take more than the specified dose. More does not mean better.
- Never double the next dose if you miss a dose.
- Do not take non-prescription medicines over a prolonged period.

Staying well

The best way to deal with minor ailments is to avoid getting them in the first place. There are a number of preventive measures which you can take to put you on track to a healthier lifestyle:

- Eat healthily
- Exercise regularly
- Don't smoke
- Have regular check-ups