

Merridale Minor Illness leaflet

Here at Merridale Medical Centre we are continually striving to improve our care to our patients despite the increasing numbers of patients accessing appointments. We have so far worked very hard to avoid a telephone triage appointment system which is becoming a more frequent option to manage increased demand for appointments. We would very much prefer to see you for face to face consultations and wish to be able to continue in the future.

However, for us to be able to continue to do so we are asking for your help to manage minor illnesses at home with over the counter medicines and advice from pharmacies.

We have available in the surgery both the 'choose well leaflet' to help you choose the correct pathways for you and your illness and 'When should I worry leaflet' for childrens health concerns.

We also have advice leaflets in the surgery on how to manage diarrhoea, stings, thrush, hay fever, cough and colds, improving your sleep and tiredness.

If you require over the counter medicines on prescription and you have had before recently please ring in and order, you do not need to be seen. Medicines included in this are for hay fever, inhalers, thrush treatments, lotions for eczema and some pain medications.

Self-Care

A lot of illness can be treated at home by using over the counter medicine and getting plenty of rest. It is worth keeping in your medicine cabinet: paracetamol or aspirin, anti-diarrhoeal medicine, rehydration mixture, indigestion remedies, plasters and a thermometer.

Fever is a normal response that even may help to fight infections. Fever does not harm you or your child. Fevers of 40 C or more can be related to a more serious infection and is appropriate to seek medical help.

You lower temperatures with the use of Paracetamol and or Ibuprofen. Don't over wrap yourself or your child.

Coughs and colds

There is a difference between colds and flu although they are both virus infections. Antibiotics have no effect on viruses, there is no cure to a cold, and you just have to wait while your natural body defences fight off the virus. This can take several days, but you can effectively treat the symptoms and make yourself more comfortable with over-the counter medicines.

Flu is also caused by viruses, in most cases it comes on quickly with shivering, headache, muscle aches in the back and legs and dizziness. A high temperature always develops but should go down in 24 hours. You may also have loss of appetite, nausea and vomiting. The worse is usually over in 4-5 days and can take up to 10days.

There is a leaflet available in the health promotion area called 'The battle against colds and flu', which will help you to manage your illness.

Sore throats.

A sore throat is normally a symptom of a viral infection including a cold. In around a third of cases, no cause for the sore throat can be found.

Sore throats are common, especially in children and teenagers. This is because young people have not built up immunity (resistance) against many of the viruses and bacteria that can cause sore throats.

Most sore throats are not serious and pass within three to seven days without the need for medical treatment. Over-the-counter painkillers, such as paracetamol or ibuprofen, can usually relieve the symptoms of a sore throat without the need to see a GP.

You should make an appointment to see your GP if:

- you have a persistent (lasting several days) high temperature above 38C (100.4F), which is not reduced by medication
- your symptoms do not improve after two weeks
- you have frequent sore throats that do not respond to painkillers

Antibiotics are not usually prescribed for a sore throat, unless it is particularly severe or you are considered at risk of a more serious infection. 13 out of 14 patients who take antibiotics will get better just as quickly as if they had not taken any.

Self-care tips

If you or someone in your family has a sore throat, the tips below may help relieve the symptoms:

- Avoid food or drink that is too hot as this could irritate your throat.
- Eat cool, soft food and drink cool or warm liquids.
- Adults and older children can suck lozenges, hard sweets, ice cubes or ice lollies.
- Avoid smoking and smoky environments.
- Regularly gargle with a mouthwash of warm, salty water to reduce any swelling or pain.
- Drink enough fluids, especially if you have a high temperature (fever).

Chesty coughs

Often with a cold you or your child may have a chesty cough. This can cause worry as you may believe that a chesty cough is a sign of having a chest infection. Coughing helps the

body fight against infection and take a while to go. Cough syrups probably do not help. Most people who do take antibiotics do not get better any faster than those people who do not take them. On average people who have had antibiotics will have a cough for only half a day less than those who don't.

Earache

Earache is cited as the most common reason for a parent to call a doctor out of hours for their child. It will often be the result of a viral ear infection. There is normally no need to treat ear infections with antibiotics

Earache can be a sharp, dull or burning ear pain that comes and goes or is constant. One or both ears may be affected.

You should only make an appointment to be seen if:

you or your child has a high temperature (fever) of 38°C (100.4°F) or above, you or your child has other symptoms, such as severe headache, dizziness, or swelling around the ear or the earache does not improve within 24-48 hours

Self-care tips

You can use over-the-counter painkillers such as ibuprofen or paracetamol to treat the pain. Children under 16 years of age should not take aspirin.

Placing a warm flannel against the affected ear may also help to relieve the pain.

Your pharmacist may be able to recommend over-the-counter eardrops for your earache, but let them know your symptoms and ask for their advice first. Eardrops or olive oil drops should not be used if the eardrum has burst and they will not help an ear infection.

Earache caused by damage to the ear

Earache can sometimes result from injury to the inside of the ear – for example, by scraping earwax from the ear canal using a cotton bud, or poking a cotton bud too far into your ear, which can puncture the eardrum.

The ear canal is very sensitive and can easily become damaged. The ear should heal on its own without treatment, but it can take six to eight weeks for a perforated eardrum to heal. If you have perforated eardrums do not use drops.

Diarrhoea

It affects most people from time to time and is usually nothing to worry about.

What causes diarrhoea?

There are many different causes of diarrhoea, but a bowel infection (gastroenteritis) is a common cause in both adults and children.

Gastroenteritis can be caused by:

- **a virus**, such as norovirus or rotavirus
- **bacteria**, which is often found in contaminated food
- **a parasite**

The symptoms associated can vary depending on the cause. For example, if your diarrhoea is caused by an infection, you may also have a fever and severe stomach cramps.

In adults, bouts of diarrhoea can sometimes be the result of drinking too much coffee or alcohol or anxiety. Diarrhoea can also be a side effect of certain types of medication.

Treating diarrhoea

Most cases of diarrhoea clear up after a few days without treatment.

In adults, it usually improves after two to four days. In children, it often lasts slightly longer, between five and seven days.

Diarrhoea can lead to dehydration if it's severe, frequent or both, so you should drink plenty of fluids (small, frequent sips of water) while you have diarrhoea. It is very important that babies and small children do not become dehydrated.

Your pharmacist may suggest you take an oral rehydration solution (ORS) if you are particularly vulnerable to the effects of dehydration. If you are 60 years of age or over, frail, or you have a health condition such as heart disease for example, you should take extra care.

Antidiarrhoeal medicine is not usually necessary unless it is important that you shorten the length of time your diarrhoea lasts for (for example, if you need to take a long-haul flight). Over the counter medication such as Loperamide is the main medicine used to treat diarrhoea as it has been shown to be effective and has few side effects. Children should not take this medicine.

You should make an appointment to be seen only if:

In adults if diarrhoea lasts more than a few weeks may be a sign of a more serious condition. If you have persistent diarrhoea, you should visit your surgery so they can try to establish a cause. This is particularly important if you have blood or pus in your faeces.

If your baby or child has had six or more episodes of diarrhoea in the last 24 hours, you should take them to see your GP.

You should also visit your GP if you have diarrhoea and you are very unwell. Your GP may decide to investigate further by sending a stool sample to be analysed in a laboratory, for example.

Preventing diarrhoea

To prevent diarrhoea caused by infection, you should take steps to prevent the infection spreading. For example, make sure you:

- wash your hands thoroughly after going to the toilet and before eating or preparing food
- clean the toilet, including the handle and the seat, with disinfectant after each bout of diarrhoea
- avoid sharing towels, flannels, cutlery or utensils with other household members
- stay at home until at least 48 hours after the last episode of diarrhoea

Vomiting

Nausea and vomiting in adults is not usually a sign of anything serious and tends to only last one or two days. Vomiting is the body's way of ridding itself of harmful substances from the stomach, or it may be a reaction to something that has irritated the gut.

One of the most common causes of vomiting in adults is gastroenteritis. This is an infection of the gut usually caused by bacteria or a virus, such as a norovirus. Gastroenteritis also causes diarrhoea. Your immune system will usually fight off the infection after a few days.

You should only make an appointment to be seen if:

You have any of the signs described below, which mean you have a high risk of becoming dehydrated or may have a more serious underlying condition.

- You have been vomiting uncontrollably for more than 24 hours.
- You have not been able to keep down fluids for 12 hours or more.
- Your vomit is green. In this case you are probably bringing up bile, a fluid the digestive system uses to digest foods.
- There is blood in your vomit or what looks like coffee granules.

Labyrinthitis is an inner ear infection that also causes dizziness and a feeling of spinning. Your GP/NP will be able to prescribe medication to relieve your symptoms while your immune system fights off the infection, which may take a few weeks.

Urinary tract infections (UTIs) in adult women only.

Urinary tract infections (UTIs) are very common. They can be painful and uncomfortable, but they usually pass within a few days or can be easily treated with a course of antibiotics.

UTIs are more common in women than in men. Children can also get UTIs, although this is less common. If you develop a UTI, you're likely to feel:

- pain or a burning sensation when urinating (doctors refer to this as dysuria)
- a need to urinate often
- Pain in the lower abdomen (tummy) you may find that your UTI symptoms are mild and pass within a few days.

You should make an appointment to see your GP if:

If you are finding your symptoms very uncomfortable or if they last for more than five days.

And if you have a UTI and:

- you develop a high temperature
- your symptoms suddenly get worse
- you are pregnant
- you have diabetes
- All children need an appointment to be seen.

Treating UTIs

Urinary tract infections usually get better on their own within four or five days.

What causes a UTI?

A UTI develops when part of the urinary tract becomes infected, usually by bacteria. Bacteria can enter the urinary tract through the urethra or, more rarely, through the bloodstream.

There is usually no obvious reason why the urinary tract gets infected, although some women find that they develop a UTI after having sex. UTIs are not sexually transmitted infections (STIs) but irritation from having sex can sometimes trigger a UTI.

UTIs in men are far less common than in women, and need investigating to find an underlying cause. These causes may include narrowing of the urethra (a stricture), a previous STI, a bladder stone or a problem with the prostate gland.

Emptying your bladder after sex, wiping from front to back after going to the toilet, avoiding constipation and drinking cranberry juice are all thought to reduce your risk of developing a urinary tract infection.

If suspect you may have a UTI you can drop in a urine sample into the surgery any morning for testing. We will contact you if you need antibiotics or need to be seen. All men and children need to be seen.

Back pain

Back pain is a common problem that affects most people at some point in their life. It usually feels like an ache, tension or stiffness in your back.

The pain can be triggered by bad posture while sitting or standing, bending awkwardly, or lifting incorrectly.

Back pain is not generally caused by a serious condition and in most cases; it gets better within 12 weeks. It can usually be successfully treated by taking painkillers and keeping

mobile. Backache is most common in the lower back, although it can be felt anywhere along your spine, from your neck down to your hips.

Treating back pain

If you have back pain, you should try to remain as active as possible and continue with your daily activities. In the past, doctors recommended rest for back pain, but most experts now agree that being inactive for long periods is bad for your back. Moderate activity, such as walking or doing everyday tasks, will help your recovery.

You can take painkillers, such as paracetamol or ibuprofen, if you feel the need to. Hot or cold compression packs may also help reduce the pain. You can buy compression packs from your local pharmacy, or a bag of frozen vegetables and a hot water bottle will work just as well.

Your state of mind can also play an important role. Although it can be difficult to be cheerful if you are in pain, research has shown that people who remain positive tend to recover quicker than those who get depressed.

Some people choose to have manual therapy, such as physiotherapy, chiropractic or osteopathy, as soon as the pain starts. Private appointments cost around £40.

For back pain that lasts more than six weeks (which doctors describe as chronic), treatment typically involves a combination of painkillers and either exercise classes or manual therapy.

Backache in pregnancy

It's quite common to get backache in pregnancy. If you're pregnant, you may not want to take painkillers, but there are other ways of easing the discomfort. Please talk to your midwife.

Most cases of back pain get better on their own and you do not need to see a doctor.

However, you should visit your GP if you are worried about your back or you are finding it difficult to cope with the pain.

You should seek immediate medical help if your back pain is accompanied by:

- fever of 38°C (100.4°F) or above
- unexplained weight loss
- swelling in the back
- constant back pain that doesn't ease after lying down
- pain in your chest or high up in your back
- pain down your legs and below the knees
- loss of bladder or bowel control
- inability to pass urine
- numbness around your genitals, buttocks or back passage
- pain that is worse at night

These are known as 'red flag symptoms' and could be a sign of something more serious.

Preventing back pain

How you sit, stand, lie and lift can all affect the health of your back.

Try to avoid placing too much pressure on your back and ensure your back is strong and supple. Regular exercise, such as walking and swimming is an excellent way of preventing back pain. Activities such as Pilates or yoga can improve your flexibility and strengthen your back muscles. There are exercise leaflets to help back pain in reception please ask at the desk.

Minor sprains

For immediate self-care of a sprain or strain, try the R.I.C.E. approach — rest, ice, compression, elevation.

- **Rest.** Avoid activities that cause pain or swelling, but don't avoid all physical activity.
- **Ice.** Immediately place an ice pack on the injury. Keep the area iced for 15 to 20 minutes, and repeat several times a day for the first few days. Cold reduces pain, swelling and, possibly, bleeding. If the area turns white, stop treatment immediately. If you have vascular disease, diabetes or decreased sensation, talk with your doctor before applying ice.
- **Compression.** To help stop swelling, compress the area with an elastic bandage until the swelling stops. Don't wrap the bandage too tightly or it may reduce circulation. Begin wrapping at the end farthest from your heart. Loosen the wrap if the pain increases, the area becomes numb or swelling is occurring below the wrapped area.
- **Elevation.** To reduce swelling, elevate the injured area above the level of your heart, especially at night. Gravity helps reduce swelling by draining excess fluid.

Over-the-counter pain medications such as ibuprofen and paracetamol also can be helpful.

After the first two days, gently begin to use the injured area. You should see a gradual, progressive improvement in the joint's ability to support your weight or your ability to move without pain. Mild and moderate sprains usually heal in three to six weeks.

These health information extracts are taken from the NHS Choices web sites. They provide information on many health topics.



Helen Rhodes. September 2014