



feel **Better**

**A Guide to
Managing Your
Minor Ailments
Effectively**

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This booklet is intended to help you get the best from your medicines.

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Introduction

Have you ever suffered from any of the following?

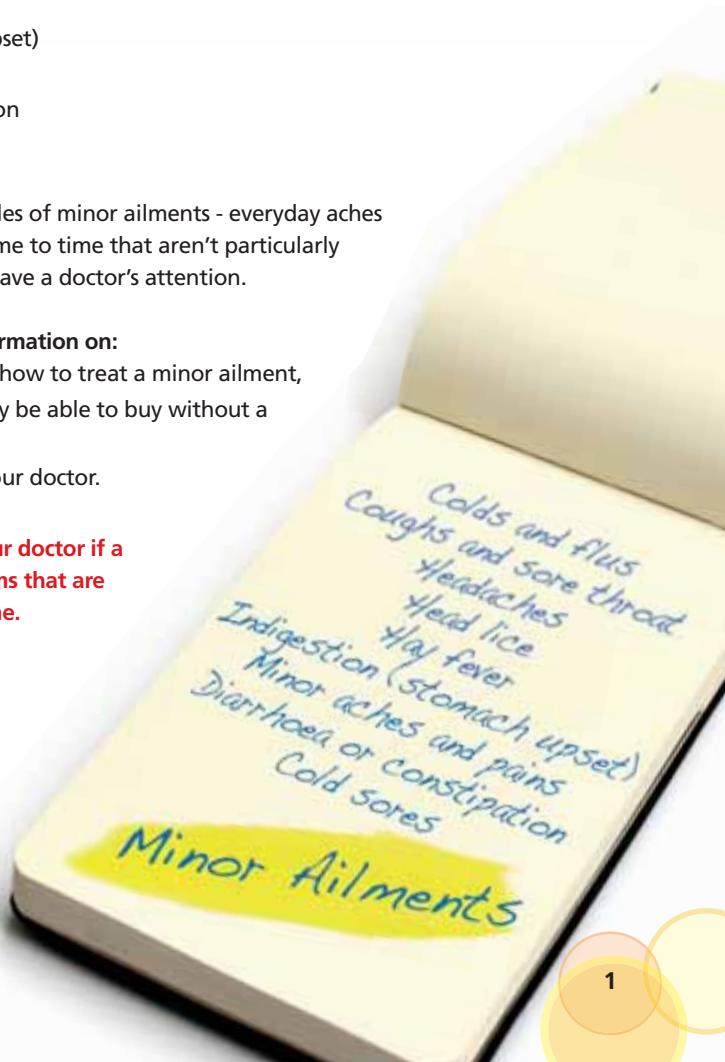
- Colds and flus
- Coughs and sore throat
- Headaches
- Head lice
- Hay fever
- Indigestion (stomach upset)
- Minor aches and pains
- Diarrhoea or constipation
- Cold sores

These are just a few examples of minor ailments - everyday aches and ills that we get from time to time that aren't particularly serious and don't need to have a doctor's attention.

This booklet gives you information on:

- where to get advice on how to treat a minor ailment,
- what medicines you may be able to buy without a prescription, and
- when you should see your doctor.

Remember: Always see your doctor if a minor ailment has symptoms that are severe or last for a long time.



Getting advice

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.

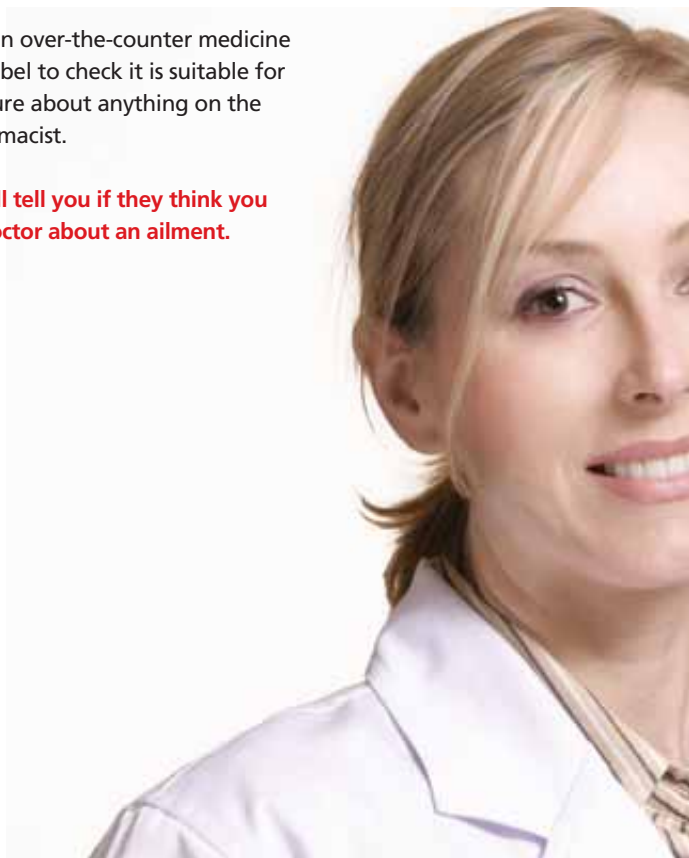
We often turn to our friends and family for advice. Sometimes, this is not the best course of action, the treatments that suit them might not be right for you.

Health columns in magazines and newspapers are also a useful source of advice, but they might not have all the answers you need.

Your pharmacist will be able to advise you and recommend a medicine if appropriate. They are experts on medicines and are trained to recognise and treat minor ailments and give healthcare advice.

If you have picked an over-the-counter medicine yourself, read the label to check it is suitable for you. If you are unsure about anything on the label, ask your pharmacist.

Your pharmacist will tell you if they think you need to see your doctor about an ailment.



Things to tell your Pharmacist

To help your pharmacist give you the best possible advice, make sure you tell them:

- your symptoms (signs that you are not well);
- how long the symptoms have lasted; and
- whether 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;
- pregnant or breastfeeding; or
- being treated for any other condition.

Tell your pharmacist if you have any other medical condition and what medicines, if any, you are taking for it. This will help the pharmacist recommend the right medicine for you so that it doesn't harm you or interact with any medicine you are already taking. If medicines interact with each other, one or other of them can become less effective or produce side effects.

You must tell your pharmacist if you are taking warfarin or being treated for:

- high blood pressure;
- heart disease;
- diabetes;
- asthma;
- stomach ulcer;
- depression;
- thyroid disease;
- prostate disease;
- glaucoma; or
- kidney or liver disease.

Treating minor ailments

The best way to deal with minor ailments is to avoid getting them in the first place. The best ways to do this are to:

- eat healthily;
- exercise regularly;
- avoid smoking; and
- have regular check-ups.

However, if you do have a minor ailment, you can usually manage it with non-prescription medicines, also known as over-the-counter (OTC) medicines. Some types, such as cold remedies, relieve minor symptoms for a short while. Others can treat ailments such as athlete's foot or, with a doctor's guidance, help manage regular conditions like eczema and thrush.

Over the next three pages you will see a list of minor ailments and suggested treatments.

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	Treatment
Colds and flu	<p>Sneezing Blocked or runny nose Fever and headache General aches and pains</p> <p>The symptoms of flu are more severe than those of a cold and include high fever, aches and pains, severe headache, exhaustion and loss of appetite. These usually appear suddenly (within 12 hours of feeling unwell).</p>	<p>Decongestant tablet or decongestant spray to unblock the nose</p> <p>Anti-histamine to dry up a runny nose</p> <p>Pain reliever for aches and pains and to reduce temperature (see below)</p>
Coughs	Coughing – either a dry or tickly cough or a chesty cough	<p>A cough reliever to stop the cough for a dry ticklish cough with no phlegm</p> <p>An expectorant for a chesty cough to help loosen up the phlegm</p>
Sore throat	Pain and inflammation (shown by swelling or redness)	<p>Lozenges or a throat spray containing anti-bacterials or anaesthetics</p> <p>Aspirin or a liquid antiseptic (gargled)</p>
Headache Toothache Period pain Joint and muscular pains Backache	Pain	<p>Paracetamol or anti-inflammatory such as aspirin or ibuprofen</p> <p>Pain relievers containing codeine or caffeine to relieve symptoms more quickly</p>
Indigestion	<p>Stomach ache Heartburn Nausea Belching Bloating</p>	<p>An antacid to reduce acid in the stomach</p> <p>An acid suppressant to stop your stomach from forming too much acid</p> <p>A gum called an alginate to build a protective barrier on top of the stomach and so stop stomach acid from flowing back up the food pipe</p> <p>How to prevent it Avoid taking too much rich and spicy food and alcohol and eating late at night.</p>

Minor ailment	Symptoms	Treatment
Diarrhoea	Loose and frequent bowel movements Cramps If this continues for a long time or your stools are bloody, see your doctor.	A tablet containing loperamide to stop the diarrhoea Oral rehydration powders (taken as a drink) to replace lost fluids and minerals
Constipation	Infrequent bowel movements If this continues for a long time, see your doctor.	A fibre substitute or laxative to stimulate bowel movements How to prevent it Increase the amount of fibre in your diet and drink more fluid.
Head lice	Itchy head or neck or a rash that is often worse behind the ears or on the back of the neck It is possible to have head lice for several months before noticing any itchiness. Some people may not report itching at all.	A fine comb to physically remove lice and 'nits' when hair is wet All the hair needs to be combed section by section from the roots: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • twice a week, • for at least two weeks, and • for at least 30 minutes each time. <i>Insecticide</i> - your pharmacist, doctor or public health nurse can advise which one to use Do not use head lice products to prevent head lice.
Hay fever	Sneezing Runny or stuffy nose Watery eyes Headache	An anti-histamine to relieve sneezing and watery eyes A spray to prevent and treat hay fever How to prevent it Avoid pollen.
Acne	Spots, whiteheads and blackheads	A product that contains benzoyl peroxide to treat spots How to prevent it Wash frequently with medicated soaps and scrubs.
Contact dermatitis or allergic skin reactions	Red dry scaly skin	Emollient or oily preparations when washing to moisturise and soften the skin 1% hydrocortisone cream or ointment to reduce inflammation (redness)

Minor ailment	Symptoms	Treatment
Cold sores	Itching, tingling or burning sensation and sores on or around lips If these continue for a long time, see your doctor.	Anti-viral cream containing aciclovir to treat the viral infection that causes the cold sore
Athlete's foot	Itchy sore sensation between toes; cracking and peeling	A cream or ointment to treat the fungal infection that causes Athlete's foot - your pharmacist, doctor or public health nurse can advise which one to use How to prevent it Wash feet often and dry thoroughly, as damp conditions encourage the fungal infection further.
Dandruff	White flakes on hair or clothes	A medicated shampoo containing coal tar, ketoconazole or selenium How to prevent it Wash hair often and rinse thoroughly each time.
Vaginal thrush This should first be diagnosed by a doctor.	White vaginal discharge Itching or burning sensation	A vaginal cream and/or pessaries (for internal use) containing clotrimazole to treat the fungal infection that causes thrush
Cystitis This should first be diagnosed by a doctor.	Frequent need to urinate Burning sensation when passing urine. See your doctor if you have back pain or fever with these symptoms.	A preparation containing sodium citrate, potassium citrate or sodium bicarbonate to make the urine less acidic How to prevent it Drink more fluids. Do not delay urinating.
Piles (also known as haemorrhoids)	Swelling of blood vessels inside back passage Itching and/or pain If there is any blood, see your doctor.	Medication containing soothing agents, local anaesthetics and/or hydrocortisone to reduce pain and swelling
Baldness	Loss of hair	A lotion containing minoxidil to help stimulate hair growth

Taking your medicine correctly

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

The label will include:

- the name of the product 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;
- when you should throw out the medicine (the expiry date);
- special storage instructions, for example at a low temperature, if relevant;
- a list of other ingredients in the medicine besides drugs, for example colouring agents, preservatives and binding agents. These types of ingredients are called excipients – they can have a particular action or effect, but they do not directly treat the condition.

Be aware that medications might contain lactose or gluten, so if you are allergic to these, take extra care to read the label.

The label also includes:

- details of the manufacturer; and
- a product authorisation number (for example PA 333/2/1), which shows that the Irish Medicines Board has licensed the medication for sale in Ireland. It only does this when it is satisfied that the medicine does what it claims to do, is safe and is made to the highest standards.

The patient information leaflet inside the medicine package contains the following additional information:

- Details of how the medicine works
- Guidance on when you shouldn't take the medication, for example if you have a particular condition
- Special warnings about what to avoid when taking the medication, for example driving or operating machinery if the medicine causes drowsiness
- Details of interactions with other drugs – in other words, how mixing the medication with food, alcohol or other medicines might make it less effective or perhaps harmful to you
- Instructions on what to do if you forget to take a dose or if you take too much

Possible side effects

Some medicines can cause side effects. 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

These symptoms might be due to the medication or other causes. In any case, contact your doctor or pharmacist immediately.



Safety and your medicine

Keep your medicine in a cool dry place, out of sunlight.

Store your medicine in its original container and do not repack it.

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 medicines that have passed their expiry date. Ask your pharmacist for advice on how to safely dispose of them.

Never use medicine if you see any signs of tampering in the pack or if the medicine looks discoloured or odd in any way.





When to talk to your doctor

Sometimes it is better to see your doctor than try to treat a minor ailment yourself. Your ailment might be due to a more serious condition or you may need a treatment that is only available on prescription.

It's important to see your doctor in the following cases.

- Your symptoms are severe or have lasted for a long time.
- You have tried non-prescription medicines and they haven't worked.
- You have 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 being unwell.
- There is a sudden change in your bowel habits.
- You suddenly begin to experience constant heartburn and are aged 40 or under.
- You are diabetic and have foot problems or mouth ulcers.
- You cough up green or 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 problems with 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 you take them for long periods of time or take more than the package instructions advise, they could hide a more serious condition, minimise the effect of a prescription medicine or poison you.

- 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 stated 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.
- Do not take two or more products containing paracetamol together at the same time. If you are not sure whether a product contains paracetamol, check the label or ask your pharmacist.



You can get copies of another booklet,
Tips for Taking Medicines,
from your pharmacist or through the Health Service Executive.

Visit
www.medicines.ie
for medicines information.

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