

NHS ENGLAND HAS INTRODUCED GUIDELINES THAT SET OUT WHICH OVER THE COUNTER ITEMS SHOULD NOT BE PRESCRIBED IN PRIMARY CARE

In the year prior to June 2017, the NHS spent approximately £569 million on prescriptions for medicines that can be purchased over the counter from a pharmacy and other outlets such as supermarkets.¹ Over the counter products currently prescribed include cough mixture and cold treatments, painkillers, eye drops, laxatives and sun cream lotions.

NHS England estimate savings of around £100 million a year² by cutting such prescriptions for minor, short term conditions, many of which will cure themselves or cause no long term effect on health.³ An example is paracetamol, a commonly used painkiller that is an average of four times as expensive when purchased in pharmacies or supermarkets. It can cost around £34 for 32 tablets on prescription including dispensing and GP consultation fees

THESE PRESCRIPTIONS INCLUDE ITEMS FOR A MINOR CONDITION

■ That is considered to be self-limiting and so does not need treatment as it will heal of its own accord;

■ Which lends itself to self-care, i.e. that the person suffering does not normally need to seek medical care but may decide to seek help with symptom relief from a local pharmacy and use an over the counter medicine

OR ITEMS

■ For which there is limited evidence of clinical effectiveness (fish oil, herbal remedies and homeopathy and more)

■ This will also free up millions of GP appointments that are currently taken up with prescribing these medicines

NHS England consulted with GPs, pharmacists, Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) Royal College of General Practitioners, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), Department of Health and held stakeholder events which were attended by groups including the Patient Association, National Voices and Health watch England to test out and shape the proposals. Feedback was obtained via online surveys, patient stakeholder events in London, Leeds and Birmingham and engagement with target stakeholder groups including older people, individuals with learning disabilities and Citizen's Advice clients

The NHS Clinical Commissioners (the independent collective voice of clinical commissioners) have issued a Healthcare professional's quick reference guide for conditions for which over the counter items should not be routinely prescribed in primary care.

Will prescribing of over the counter items be banned?

NO. The decisions made by the CCGs who are responsible for managing prescribing decisions who reflect local policies and guidance will not remove the clinical discretion of the prescriber in individual cases

There will be exceptions to the guidance and these can include situations whereby patients should continue to have treatments

prescribed with some examples being If they have a long term condition (e.g. regular pain relief for chronic arthritis or treatments for inflammatory bowel disease), treatment of more complex forms of minor illnesses (e.g. severe migraines that are unresponsive to over the counter medicines), and for those with complex illness or an individual who has a minor condition suitable for self - care but has not responded sufficiently to treatment with an over the counter product.

For more information on the guidance and frequently asked questions, go to:

www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/2/items-which-should-not-be-routinely-prescribed-faqs-updated.pdf

These items are detailed as follows:

Items of limited clinical effectiveness

Probiotics
Vitamins and minerals

Self-limiting conditions

Acute Sore Throat
Infrequent cold sores of the lip
Conjunctivitis
Coughs and colds and nasal congestion
Cradle Cap (Seborrhoeic dermatitis – infants)
Haemorrhoids
Infant Colic
Mild Cystitis

Minor conditions suitable for self-care

Mild irritant dermatitis
Dandruff
Diarrhoea (Adults)
Dry eyes, sore tired eyes
Earwax
Excessive sweating (Hyperhidrosis)
Head lice
Indigestion and Heartburn
Infrequent Constipation
Infrequent Migraine
Insect bites and stings
Mild Acne
Mild Dry Skin
Sunburn due to excessive sun exposure
Sun Protection
Mild to Moderate Hay fever, Seasonal Rhinitis
Minor burns and scalds
Minor conditions associated with pain, discomfort and fever. (e.g. aches and sprains, headache, period pain, back pain)
Mouth ulcers
Nappy Rash
Oral Thrush
Prevention of dental caries
Ringworm, Athletes foot
Teething, Mild toothache
Threadworms
Travel Sickness
Warts and Verrucae

1. www.engage.england.nhs.uk/consultation/over-the-counter-items-not-routinely-prescribed/

2. www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/otc-public-faqs.pdf

3. www.england.nhs.uk/2017/11/prescription-curbs-to-free-up-hundreds-of-millions-of-pounds-for-frontline-care/