

You can save yourself time by treating some minor health problems at home and with treatments available over the counter (for less than the cost of a prescription!). In addition to this leaflet, the **NHS and Patient UK websites** are excellent and regularly updated.

**Cough/cold/bronchitis** – last 1-4 weeks. A cough is a good thing – it is the body's defence for the lung. Green mucus is normal.

Treatment – honey and lemon drinks for cough/sore throat. Cough syrups and decongestants can help symptoms in some people. Avoid smoke. Use extra pillows.

From your pharmacy:

- Decongestants for nose/sinuses
- Paracetamol or Ibuprofen for pain and fever
- Zinc and Vitamin C tablets/lozenges also help prevent infection.

Contact the surgery if: Painful, fast, difficult breathing; being very wheezy, coughing up blood or short of breath, prolonged fever > 5days, short of breath or blue lips, feeling drowsy or confused. If patient is a baby under 6 weeks old or a child with a high temperature (39°C) for more than 3 days.

**Flu** – high fever for 3-5 days, aching muscles, up to 2 weeks until fully better. Treatment - as for cough.

Contact the surgery if: as for cough, plus high temperature for more than 5-6 days.

People who have chest, heart, kidney and liver problem, diabetes, are over 65 or are on steroids, are receiving chemotherapy or pregnant ladies should have **annual flu vaccination**.

**Sore throat** – lasts 10 days-2 weeks. Enlarged tonsils, neck glands, swollen neck glands and painful swallowing are all common. Treatment – Lozenges and gargles, Paracetamol or Ibuprofen for pain and fever, Zinc and Vitamin C to help fight infection. Contact the surgery if:

Not able to swallow at all, it's not settling down after 5 days and you have pus on your tonsils, high fever or large tender glands in the neck with no sore throat.

**Ear infection** – lasts 4-10 days, often severe pain for 2-3 days, often follows a cold. Treatment:

- Decongestants can help
- Paracetamol or ibuprofen for pain and fever.

Contact the surgery if: runny ear for more than 7 days; the pain or fever is still bad after 3 days (2 days for children under 1) or if a repeated infection.

**Sinus infection** – lasts 2-3 weeks, often follows a cold, green discharge from nose, pain in face. Treatment – Decongestants and Paracetamol/ibuprofen from your pharmacy. Contact the surgery if: fever and pain in your forehead or around your eyes which gets worse.

**Hoarseness/Laryngitis** – usually due to a virus. Lasts 2-4 weeks. Treatment – Lozenges and gargles, Paracetamol or Ibuprofen for pain and fever, Zinc and Vitamin C, try not to speak. Contact the surgery if: it lasts for more than 4 weeks or difficulty swallowing. Prolonged fever > 5days, feeling drowsy or confused. If patient is a baby under 6 weeks old or a child with a high temperature (39°C) for more than 3 days.

**Meningitis** – Have you done the glass test? If there are any red spots, press the side of the clear drinking glass firmly against the rash. If spots are still visible through the glass – contact the surgery. Meningitis is rare infection in the lining of the brain. Outbreak in institutions are common (e.g. halls of residence, camps), but a fever and headache are nearly always **not** due to meningitis. Symptoms – often rapid deterioration with fever, severe headache, neck stiffness and sensitivity to bright light (unless migraine).

In babies – floppy when their temperature is down, abnormal cry or handling, very unwell without an

obvious cause. Treatment – **contact the doctor urgently.**

**Cystitis (urine infection)** – a burning feeling, smelly urine, needing to go to the toilet often. Common in women, 50% better within 3 days on no antibiotics. Treatment – Potassium citrate or similar from your pharmacy. Drink 8 pints of fluid a day, cranberry juice can help. To prevent cystitis, wash before sex and urinate afterwards. Avoid tight/irritant underwear.

Contact the surgery if: Blood in urine, back pain, pregnancy, symptoms not improving after 4-5 days, 'rigors' (feverish shivering), vomiting, and if you are male (as cystitis is more unusual).

**Diarrhoea & vomiting** – Lasts 5-7 days, usually caused by viruses, antibiotics don't usually help. Treatment – Avoid dehydration: drink plenty (if you are sick, drink little and often), meticulous hygiene (wash your hands). From your pharmacy: Dioralyte for fluid, sugars and salts, Loperamide for cramps and diarrhoea (not for children). Contact the surgery if: High fever, not passing urine in 12 hrs, feeling dizzy, drowsy or confused.

**Constipation** – usually caused by low fibre foods, not doing enough exercise and not drinking enough fluids. Treatment – exercise 1/2hrs a day, drink plenty of water (3-4 pints/day for adults), eat high fibre foods (brown rice, raw veg, fruit, wholemeal bread and bran). Contact the surgery if: mucus or blood in your motion, persistent change in bowel movements that last for several weeks.

**Piles** – burning, itching and bleeding after bowel movement, occur around anus. Treatment - avoid constipation (see constipation), ice in a plastic bag can relieve pain if the piles are external. From your pharmacy: piles creams and ointments.

Contact the surgery if: Bleeding piles for the first time, if you are over 45 and you have piles for the first time, very big and very painful piles not resolving in 2 weeks or if you unsure they are piles.

**Heartburn** – stomach acid leaks into your gullet. Made worse by aspirin/ibuprofen, stress, anxiety, alcohol, smoking, caffeine, citrus fruit and being overweight. May be a side-effect of some prescribed medication. Treatment – modify diet, stop smoking and drinking alcohol, eat small meals often, raise your bed head. From your pharmacy: Antacids, avoid Aspirin, Ibuprofen or similar. Contact the surgery if: severe or continuous stomach pain, losing weight or losing your appetite, black sticky stools, bloody vomit.

**Back pain** – 75% of patients get better in 4-6 weeks. Usually a spasm, or swollen nerve roots or joints. X-rays aren't usually helpful. Treatment – keep active (see physio videos on [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)). From your pharmacy: Paracetamol or Ibuprofen. Contact the surgery if: Numbness, weak muscles, can't pass urine or open bowels, no improvement after 6 weeks, the pain is after a crash or fall, you feel generally unwell, have taken steroid tablets in the past or have had cancer.

**Headache** (incl. Migraine) – usually due to stress/tension, migraine (disturbed vision, feeling sick and uncomfortable around light, sound), colds or sinusitis. From your pharmacy: Paracetamol, Co-codamol and Ibuprofen, think about posture, neck exercises and stress, cut out chocolate, cheese and alcohol. Contact the surgery if: Sudden onset headache, deep neck pain, vomiting (unless migraine), drowsy, purple rash, very severe headache without an obvious cause, pale colour despite high temperature, abnormal cry in babies and children, a bad headache when you wake up, a bad headache following an accident/fall, getting worse or not going away after 1 week.

**Bites and stings** - Remove bee stings with tweezers or by gently brushing it out of the skin. From your pharmacy: Creams and tablets are available which can relieve most symptoms.

**Bumps and bruises** - if you can still put weight on it or use it as normal, the bone is unlikely to be broken. Relieve pain and swelling with a cold compress. Frozen vegetables wrapped in a tea towel work very well. From your pharmacy: Paracetamol or Ibuprofen (Including rub on gels).

**Nose bleed** - to stop the bleeding, pinch the fleshy part of the nostrils just below the bridge of the nose. Do not lean backwards. Hold the nose gently closed and breathe through the mouth. Avoid hot drinks and use an ice pack. The bleeding should stop within 10 minutes.

**Tiredness** – Commonly due to stress, you may feel tired after a virus or when you are feeling stressed or depressed. Treatment – regular exercise improves your fitness and energy levels. If you are stressed, can you share your problems? Limit the amount of alcohol you drink and eat healthily. Contact the surgery if: tiredness for several weeks with no explanation with reduced appetite, weight, bowel, urine or period changes. Also, if new shortness of breath or thirst.

**Vaginal discharge** – lots of discharge, smell and/or itching, sometimes after antibiotics, thrush usually white and itchy. Treatment – change tampons/towels regularly, wash daily. From your pharmacy: Thrush treatment. Contact the surgery if: Pain or fever, continuous itching or discharge for 2 weeks, dark coloured or smelly discharge, if you suspect it's sexually transmitted.

# Self-care



Recommended websites:

[www.brooksidegrouppractice.co.uk](http://www.brooksidegrouppractice.co.uk)

[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

[www.patient.co.uk](http://www.patient.co.uk)

[www.selfcareforum.org](http://www.selfcareforum.org)