

# Summary of Guidance: Conditions for which OTC items should not routinely be prescribed

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NHS England published guidance on the conditions for which OTC items should not routinely be prescribed in April 2018; the implementation of this guidance was discussed at the PACEF meeting in May 2018 and the rationale given for not prescribing, along with exceptions and additional guidance is below.

## General Exceptions to the Guidance (*the patients for whom prescribing would be acceptable*):

- Patients prescribed the product for a long-term condition
- When the condition is considered more complex e.g. severe migraine unresponsive to OTC medication
- Patients whose symptoms suggest that the condition is not minor e.g. when there are red flag symptoms
- Complex patients and/or where the treatment is to tackle an adverse effect or symptom of more complex illness e.g. those who are immunocompromised
- Treatments that are prescription only or where the OTC product is unlicensed for the particular patient or condition (see guidance notes below)
- Patients who have not responded sufficiently to treatment purchased

**PLEASE ALSO REFER PATIENTS TO NHS CHOICES WEBSITE FOR FURTHER SELF CARE INFORMATION**

## Self-Limiting Conditions

Condition	Rationale for not prescribing	Specific Exceptions (where prescribing is considered acceptable)	Guidance for patients and prescribers
Acute sore throat	Usually a self-limiting condition without treatment	Red flag symptoms	A wide variety of analgesics, lozenges and sprays can be purchased from pharmacies and other retail outlets such as supermarkets.
Infrequent cold sores of	Usually a self-limiting condition without	Red flag symptoms	Anti-viral creams can be purchased from pharmacies and other

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the lip	treatment; anti-viral creams can help ease symptoms and hasten healing time.	Immunocompromised patients	retail outlets. Hydrocolloid cold sore patches can also be bought if preferred.
Conjunctivitis	Usually a self-limiting condition without treatment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Infective: for severe cases chloramphenicol eye drops or ointment can be used (see guidance for restrictions)</li> <li>Irritant: removing the irritant will usually resolve the issue</li> </ul> Allergic: can be treated with OTC products	Red flag symptoms	<b>Infective:</b> Chloramphenicol eye drops and ointment can only be purchased from pharmacies. The patient must be at least 2 years old and have not had a previous recent episode of conjunctivitis. Importantly, the Summaries of Product Characteristics for the eye drops state that patients who are contact lens wearers should be referred to their GP <sup>1,2</sup> . The eye ointment SPC refers to avoiding contact lens use during ocular infection <sup>3</sup> .  <b>Allergic:</b> Antihistamine oral liquids and eye drops can be purchased from pharmacies. Tablets are available from many retail outlets too.
Coughs, colds and nasal congestion	Usually self-limiting conditions	Red flag symptoms	A wide variety of products are available from pharmacies and retail outlets to ease the symptoms of these conditions.  Prescribers should be mindful that paracetamol and ibuprofen suspensions available to purchase are only suitable for babies who are 3 months and older unless the indication is post immunisation pyrexia in which case they can be used from 2 months.
Cradle Cap (Seborrhic dermatitis – infants)	Usually a self-limiting condition without treatment resolving within a few weeks to months.	If causing distress to the infant and not improving	Tips to help reduce the build-up of scales on the scalp: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>regular washing of the scalp with a baby shampoo, followed by gentle brushing with a soft brush to loosen scales.</li> <li>soften the scales with baby oil first, followed by gentle brushing, and then wash off with baby shampoo.</li> <li>soak the crusts overnight with white petroleum jelly, or vegetable or olive oil, and shampoo in the morning.</li> </ul> Dentinox Cradle Cap Shampoo is available from pharmacies and retail outlets if desired.
Haemorrhoids	Usually a self-limiting condition which will resolve within days if straining is avoided and simple dietary changes are made.	Red flag symptoms	A wide variety of products are available to buy from pharmacies and retail outlets ease the discomfort associated with this condition including creams, ointments, suppositories and sprays.

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Infant Colic	Usually improves on its own without medical treatment.	Red flag symptoms	A variety of products are available from pharmacies and other retail outlets.
Mild Cystitis	Mild is defined by NHSE as “cases responsive to symptomatic treatment but will also clear up on their own”	Red flag symptoms or symptoms lasting more than 3 days	Sachets of sodium citrate can be purchased that reduce the acidity of the urine. These are intended for short term use by <b>adult women only</b> <sup>4</sup> .
Mild Irritant Dermatitis	Defined by NHSE as “a type of eczema triggered by contact with a particular substance. Once treated most people can expect their symptoms to improve and/or clear up completely if the irritant can be identified and avoided”	No routine exceptions identified by NHSE.  However, there are restrictions on the sale of topical corticosteroids from pharmacies and because of this the pack sizes are small e.g. 15g (see guidance notes)	Treatment can include use of emollients and/or topical corticosteroids.  Hydrocortisone 1% cream is licensed for patients of all ages on the advice of a doctor but if this has not been sought patients must be over the age of 10 years. In addition, treatment can only be for a maximum of 7 days and the maximum frequency of application is twice a day. It cannot be sold for use on the face, ano-genital region or broken/infected skin or for use by pregnant or lactating women <sup>5</sup> .  Clobetasone 0.05% cream can only be sold from pharmacies for adults and children aged 12 and over unless it has been recommended by a clinician. Treatment is limited to once or twice a day for a maximum of 7 days and cannot be for the face, ano-genital region or for between the toes <sup>6</sup> .
Dandruff	Defined by NHSE as “mild scaling of the scalp without itching”	No routine exceptions identified by NHSE.	NHSE suggests anti-fungal shampoos are purchased from pharmacies. In addition, other products are available from pharmacies and other retail outlets which do not contain a recognised anti-fungal medication but are marketed for dandruff.
Diarrhoea (adults)	The guidance states that periodic episodes of diarrhoea lasting a few days to a week are usually nothing to worry about.	No routine exceptions identified by NHSE	Oral rehydration salts and preparations to reduce motions can be purchased from pharmacies and other retail outlets.
Dry eyes/Sore tired eyes	NHSE states that most cases of sore tired eyes resolve and patients with this condition and mild-moderate dry eye syndrome should be encouraged to manage the condition with good eyelid	No routine exceptions identified by NHSE	A variety of ophthalmic products can be purchased from pharmacies and other retail outlets for dry/sore tired eyes.

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	hygiene, avoiding environmental causes alongside treating the issue e.g. with suitable lubricant products.		
Earwax	Build-up of earwax is a common problem and can be treated with products purchased from a pharmacy which soften the wax so it falls out naturally.	No routine exceptions identified by NHSE	Simple remedies are recommended e.g. olive oil (droppers and bottles can be purchased from pharmacies) and there are also proprietary products available from pharmacies
Excessive Sweating (Hyperhidrosis)	A common condition in which simple lifestyle changes should be attempted first line. Anti-perspirants containing aluminium chloride can be purchased first line.	No routine exceptions identified by NHSE	Aluminium hydroxide 20% antiperspirant is available to purchase from pharmacies.
Indigestion and Heartburn	Mild and infrequent episodes do not require specialist treatment. Most people are able to manage their condition by making simple lifestyle changes e.g. avoiding rich and/or spicy food and/or by taking medication such as antacids.	No routine exceptions identified by NHSE	Antacids are available from pharmacies and other retail outlets. Small packs of low dose H <sub>2</sub> antagonists and proton pump inhibitors can be purchased from retail outlets as well as pharmacies for short term use only <sup>7,8</sup> . The patient information leaflets advise patients to seek medical advice if symptoms persist.
Infrequent Constipation	Constipation can affect people of all ages and can be just for a short period. It can be managed with a change in diet or lifestyle. Laxatives should not be purchased for children unless they are prescribed.	No routine exceptions identified by NHSE	A large variety of laxatives for patients over 12 years can be purchased from pharmacists and retailers. Macrogol (half or paed) sachets are available from pharmacies for adults and adolescents.
Infrequent Migraine	Considered a common condition which can be adequately treated with purchased analgesics and anti-emetics.	No routine exceptions identified by NHSE but the guidance states that severe or recurrent migraines require medical advice.	Proprietary combination products are available from pharmacies for adults and older children/  Small packs of some triptans are also available for adults aged 18-65 from pharmacies but the initial diagnosis must have been made by a clinician and there are a lot of restrictions on the sale of this class of drugs.
Insect Bites and Stings	Most are not serious and will resolve within hours to days. Analgesics and topical products or antihistamines to relieve itching can be purchased.	No routine exceptions identified by NHSE	Anthistan cream can be used by adults, elderly and children over 2 years of age and is available from pharmacies and retail outlets. Hydrocortisone 1% cream is also licensed for insect bite reactions. <i>See Mild Irritant Dermatitis section for restrictions on the sale from pharmacies.</i>
Mild Acne	Common condition which can often be	No routine exceptions identified	A wide variety of products are available to purchase from

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	controlled with long term purchased treatment.	by NHSE	pharmacies and retail outlets.
Mild Dry Skin	Mild dry skin is not defined by NHSE but the guidance states that it can be managed long term with purchased emollients.	No routine exceptions identified by NHSE	A wide variety of products including bath, shower gels and emollients are available to purchase from pharmacies and retail outlets.
Sunburn due to excessive sun exposure & Sun Protection	Most people can manage sunburn symptoms by preventing symptoms developing using sun protection and by using purchased products.	No routine exceptions identified by NHSE for sunburn but for Protection patients with an ACBS approved indication of photodermatoses could have sun protection prescribed.	A wide variety of products e.g. emollients and “sun creams”, are available to purchase from pharmacies and retail outlets for sun burn/after sun and to prevent sunburn.
Mild to Moderate Hay Fever/Seasonal Rhinitis	A common seasonal condition for which there is no cure. Most patients with mild to moderate symptoms can relieve these with purchased products.	No routine exceptions identified by NHSE.	A wide variety antihistamine products are available for adults and children 2 years+ including oral liquids, tablets and eye drops. Nasal sprays containing corticosteroids can also be purchased from pharmacies but there are restrictions on the sale e.g. they cannot be sold for under 18s.
Minor Burns and Scalds	Burns can be treated at home if they are “minor”.	No routine exceptions identified by NHSE but the guidance states that more serious burns e.g. those that are large or deep, those that are electrical or chemical in origin, burns that affect the face, hands, arms, feet, legs or genitals causing blisters always require emergency hospital treatment.	The guidance states that antiseptic creams and treatments for burns should be kept in a medicine cabinet at home.  <i>Please note, the application of creams etc. is not recommended by NHS Choices for burns and scalds. They should be cooled and if required wrapped in cling film.</i>
Minor conditions associated with pain, discomfort and/or fever	Examples include headaches, period pain, mild fever and back pain. Patients should be encouraged to keep a small supply of purchased analgesics at home	No routine exceptions identified by NHSE	A wide variety of analgesics including paracetamol, aspirin, NSAIDs and some mild opioids are available from pharmacies. There are several restrictions on the quantity that can be sold at any one time and relating to the combinations of products that can be sold. <i>See Coughs, Colds and Nasal Congestion section for information on oral analgesic suspensions for young infants.</i>
Mouth Ulcers	A common condition which is usually a harmless and will resolve within two	No routine exceptions identified by NHSE	Purchased treatments can reduce swelling and ease discomfort; they include gels, mouthwashes and pellets

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	weeks without the need to see a doctor or dentist		containing hydrocortisone.  Patients with recurrent mouth ulcers or those which are large should not self-manage as this could be a sign of serious illness particularly if the patient takes medication that suppresses the immune system. .
<b>Nappy Rash</b>	A common problem that can be treated at home with purchased barrier preparations.	No routine exceptions have been identified by NHSE	A variety of barrier preparations are available from pharmacies and retail outlets.  If the nappy rash appears to include a fungal infection the anti-fungal topical preparations licensed for this indication can be purchased from a pharmacy.
<b>Oral Thrush</b>	A minor common condition affecting babies, those on corticosteroid inhalers and those with dentures. It can be treated without medical consultation in the first instance.	No routine exceptions have been identified however there are restrictions on the sale of the oral gel (see guidance).	Miconazole 2% oral gel is available from pharmacies and is licensed for use in adults and children from the age of 4 months <sup>9</sup> .
<b>Prevention of Dental Caries</b>	A dentist may advise that patients use a higher strength fluoride toothpaste or mouth wash if they are at particular risk of tooth decay. These can be purchased.	No routine exceptions have been identified by NHSE	Toothpastes containing 1350-1500ppm fluoride can be purchased from pharmacies and local retailers. Mouthwashes are also available.  <i>For reference, toothpastes containing 2800ppm and 5000ppm fluoride are prescription only and licensed for patients age 16 and over. They are on the Dental Practitioner's Formulary.</i>
<b>Ringworm and Athletes Foot</b>	Tinea infections are usually not serious and easily treated with purchased medication and spread can be stopped with good hygiene.	Lymphodema or history of lower limb cellulitis.	A variety of antifungal preparations e.g. creams, sprays and talcs are available from retail outlets and pharmacies.
<b>Teething/ Mild Toothache</b>	Babies: Use purchased mild local anaesthetic gels. Oral analgesics can also be given.  Adults: Treat with purchased analgesics whilst waiting for a dental appointment	No routine exceptions have been identified by NHSE	Teething and mouth gels are available from retail outlets and pharmacies. <i>See also Minor conditions associated with pain.</i>
<b>Threadworms</b>	A common condition in children (but can occur at any age). Treatment can be purchased from a pharmacy for the	No routine exceptions have been identified by NHSE however the products on sale in	The products available from pharmacies are only licensed for patients aged two and over and are contra-indicated in pregnancy. They also interact with some prescription

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	household.	pharmacies have some restrictions (see guidance).	medicines and should be used with caution in breast feeding <sup>10</sup> .
Travel Sickness	Mild motion sickness (not defined by NHSE) can be treated by various self-care measures and more severe motion sickness can be treated with purchased medicines.	No routine exceptions have been identified by NHSE	A variety of products are available from local pharmacies to help patients who experience travel sickness. These include acupressure bands, tablets and patches. There are some restrictions on the sale of some of these products e.g. hyoscine hydrobromide 300microgram tablets cannot be sold for children under the age of 3 <sup>11</sup> .
Warts and Verrucae	A common condition which is generally harmless and will tend to eventually resolve. Several treatments can be purchased to remove them more quickly.	No routine exceptions have been identified by NHSE; however, evidence of extensive warts or verrucae would require referral to a clinician.	Salicylic acid based gels and medicated plasters can be purchased from pharmacies and retail outlets. There are varying minimum age restrictions on products but the majority are suitable for children 4 and over.  Alternatively there is a treatment marketed to be an “at home cryotherapy” which can be purchased from pharmacies and used on patients aged 4 and up.

## Items of limited clinical effectiveness

	Rationale for not prescribing	Exceptions (where prescribing is acceptable)
Probiotics	Limited clinical effectiveness for treatment or prevention of diarrhoea.	ACBS approved items and/or those on the local formulary
Vitamins and Minerals	Insufficient high quality evidence to demonstrate clinical effectiveness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prescription only vitamin D analogues e.g. alfacalcidol, should continue to be prescribed.</li> <li>• Patients with a medically diagnosed deficiency including lifelong conditions or surgery associated with malabsorption; assess continuing need regularly.</li> <li>• Calcium and vitamin D for osteoporosis</li> <li>• Malnutrition including alcoholism</li> </ul> <p><i>Healthy start vitamins for pregnancy and children are to continue</i></p>

## Further information:

- NHSE Guidance Document:  
<https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/otc-guidance-for-ccgs.pdf>
- Local guidance PACEF Bulletin Vol 12 No 6 May 2018  
<http://lincolnshire-pacef.nhs.uk/lincolnshire-prescribing-and-clinical-effectiveness-forum-pacef>

## References: accessed w/c 6/8/18

1. SPC for Optrex Infected Eye Drops  
<https://www.medicines.org.uk/EMC/medicine/23300/SPC/Optrex+Infected+Eye+Drops/#PRODUCTINFO>
2. SPC for Brolene Antibiotic Eye Drops  
<https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/product/1783/smpc>
3. SPC for Chloramphenicol 1% eye ointment, Bausch and Lomb  
<https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/product/7221/smpc>
4. CanesOasis Cystitis Relief Patient Information Leaflet  
<https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/files/pil.1303.pdf>
5. SPC Hydrocortisone 1% w/w Cream  
<https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/product/4600/smpc>
6. SPC Eumovate Eczema & Dermatitis 0.05% Cream  
<https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/product/3929/smpc>
7. Heartburn and Indigestion Relief Tablets 75mg Patient information leaflet  
<https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/files/pil.8308.pdf>
8. Nexium Control Patient Information Leaflet  
<https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/product/3660/pil>
9. SPC Daktarin Surgar Free 2% Oral Gel  
<https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/product/6597/smpc>
10. SPC Ovex  
<https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/product/1317/smpc>
11. SPC Boots Travel Calm Tablets  
<https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/product/6724/smpc>
12. SPC Duofilm  
<https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/product/1176/smpc>

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Optum Commissioning Support Unit  
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T 020 7121 0560 | E [info@optum.co.uk](mailto:info@optum.co.uk) | [optum.co.uk](http://optum.co.uk)

10th Floor, 5 Merchant Square, Paddington, London, W2 1AS

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