

# Help the NHS and your GP through Self-Care



**Self-Care** is about looking after yourself in a healthy way. It can be anything from brushing your teeth, doing some exercise, managing common conditions (like headaches, colds and flu) or living with a long-term health problem, such as asthma or diabetes.

**Every year there are an estimated 57 million GP consultations and 3.7 million visits to A&E for self-treatable conditions, costing the NHS an estimated £2.3 billion \***

Around 80% of all care in the UK is self-care. The majority of people feel comfortable managing everyday minor ailments like coughs and colds themselves; particularly when they feel confident in recognising the symptoms and have successfully treated using an over-the-counter medicine before.

Research shows that people often abandon self-care earlier than they need to, typically seeking the advice of a doctor within a period of 4 – 7 days. The main reasons for this are:

- Their lack of confidence in understanding the normal progress of symptoms (e.g. a cold can last up to 14 days).
- Their perception of the severity and duration of symptoms.
- They seek assurance that nothing more serious is wrong.
- They seek a prescription to 'cure' the illness, even though the same medicine may be available over-the-counter.

**92% of people acknowledge the importance of taking responsibility for their own health in order to ease the financial burden on the NHS \***

Empowering people with the confidence and information to look after themselves when they can, and visit the GP when they need to, gives people greater control of their own health and encourages healthy behaviours that help prevent ill health in the long-term.

In many cases people can take care of their minor ailments, reducing the number of GP consultations and enabling GPs to focus on caring for higher risk patients, such as the very young and elderly, managing long-term conditions and providing new services.

Did you know that one in five GP visits are for common conditions, such as backache, headache or cough?

For most people, they are not serious health problems – you just want to know how to relieve it and you want a treatment that acts fast. You also want to know how long you're going to suffer or what you should do if your symptoms change.

The good news is that self-care can help you manage most of these problems. It may mean you don't have to spend time waiting to see your GP but can get on and start tackling your symptoms. Self-care for common conditions can also help free up some of your GP's time, making it easier to get an appointment when you have a more serious condition.

**34% of people visited a GP for a self-treatable condition in the past 12 months \***

In 2014 the NHS spent more than £83 million on prescribing 22.6 million packs of paracetamol. When made aware of the cost of self-treatable conditions to the NHS, 29% of those who qualify for free prescriptions said they would be willing to purchase an 'over the counter' medicine for a self-treatable condition \*.

**The NHS belongs to us all, and we share responsibility for making best use of its finite resources. GP Surgeries and emergency departments are under tremendous pressure at the moment. Using self-care helps everyone.**

The NHS is still here for you. Self-care is not "no care" [\* PAGB Self-care Nation Report, Nov 16]

# The Alternatives:

## Community Pharmacy

The Pharmacist is an excellent source of advice for many common ailments such as:

|                   |                         |
|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Low Back Pain     | Heartburn & Indigestion |
| Eczema            | Fever in Children       |
| Constipation      | Headache                |
| Coughs in Adults  | Common Cold             |
| Sore Throat       | Ear Ache                |
| Sinusitis         | Acne (spots)            |
| Sprains & Strains |                         |

Community pharmacies are easily accessible, open long hours and staffed with highly trained professionals.

During 2017, the summary care record is being rolled out to community pharmacies, so, with patient consent, the pharmacist will be able to know about existing conditions and medications. This will allow them to provide an even more valuable service.

## NHS Choices or Patient UK

For information on common conditions, visit the NHS Choices or Patient UK websites. NHS Choices has a symptom checker where you can get advice on what to do next.



<http://www.nhs.uk/pages/home.aspx>



<https://patient.info/>

## Your GP Surgery Website

Your Practice website will have a wide range of self-care advice and links to other sources of information on a wide variety of minor ailments and Long Term Conditions.

## Self-Care Forum Fact Sheets

The purpose of the Self-Care Forum is to further the reach of self-care and embed it into everyday life. They produce a series of fact sheets on the following:

|                   |                         |
|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Low back pain     | Fever in Children       |
| Eczema            | Headache & Migraine     |
| Constipation      | Sore throat             |
| Acne              | Heartburn & Indigestion |
| Sprains & Strains | Urine symptoms in men   |
| Coughs            | Middle ear infection    |
| Common cold       | Sinusitis               |



<http://www.selfcareforum.org/fact-sheets/>

## Expert Patients Programme

The Expert Patients Programme is a free self-management course developed for people living with any long-term health condition, such as heart disease, diabetes, asthma, arthritis, multiple sclerosis, depression, back pain, chronic fatigue syndrome etc.

They aim to help you to take more control of your health by learning new skills and techniques to manage your condition better on a daily basis. Amongst other things, the course will explore:

- How to manage common symptoms
- Action planning and problem solving
- Nutrition and Exercise
- Communication skills
- Relaxation techniques
- Medication management
- Better breathing
- Dealing with difficult emotions



<http://www.sussexcommunity.nhs.uk/services/servicedetails.htm?directoryID=16306>