

# Minor Illness Booklet



# How long will it be until I feel better?

(Average illness lengths from NICE Clinical Guidelines 69 – July 08)



**Acute ear infection**  
4 days



**Tonsillitis or sore throat**  
7 days



**Common cold**  
10 days



**Sinusitis**  
17 days



**Cough caused by viral chest infection**  
21 days

# Treatment for Acute Bronchitis

Acute bronchitis is an infection of the lining of the airways of the lungs. It is usually caused by a viral infection and can occur after a cold. Bronchitis is commoner in people who smoke.

## What are the symptoms of bronchitis?

The symptoms include:

- Chesty cough with yellow or green sputum.
- Slight breathlessness on exertion.
- Mild wheeze.
- Temperature.
- Headache and generalised aches and pains.



The cough is the main symptom and usually lasts between 7 and 10 days. However it may take 2-3 weeks to settle completely. This is because the inflammation in the airways caused by the infection may take some time to settle.

## What is the treatment for bronchitis?

- Take paracetamol or ibuprofen to reduce your temperature and relieve any aches, pains and headaches.
- Drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration.
- If you smoke, try and stop. Bronchitis, chest infections and severe lung disease are more common in smokers. If you would like help in trying to stop smoking please contact the surgery when you are feeling better.

Antibiotics are not usually advised if you are normally in good health. Bronchitis is usually caused by a virus and your immune system can usually clear the infection. They may even make you feel worse by causing side effects such as diarrhoea, feeling sick and rashes. However antibiotics may be indicated in people who have chronic (ongoing) lung disease.

## When should I come and see the doctor?

Acute bronchitis usually clears without any complications. However occasionally the infection travels to the lung tissue and causes pneumonia. You should consult medical advice if:

- Fever, wheezing or headaches become worse or severe (temperature above 38°C).
- You develop: fast breathing, shortness of breath, chest pain on breathing in or cough up blood.
- Other people notice you become drowsy or disorientated.
- Your cough lasts longer than 3 weeks.
- You have recurring bouts of acute bronchitis.
- You develop any other symptoms you are worried about.
- You have underlying chronic lung disease.

# Treatment of Acute Sinusitis



Sinusitis is an infection of the small, air filled spaces (sinuses) inside the cheekbones and forehead of the skull. Acute sinusitis is very common. The cheekbone (maxillary) sinuses are most commonly affected. Sinusitis usually clears on its own without any specific treatment after 1 week but symptoms may last up to 2-3 weeks, i.e. longer than a cold.

## What are the symptoms of sinusitis?

Symptoms that commonly occur include:

- Pain and tenderness over the affected sinus. This is often throbbing and may become worse when you bend your head forward.
- Blocked and runny nose, often with the loss of smell and taste.
- Headache and fever.

Other symptoms that may occur include: toothache, a cough, a feeling of pressure or fullness in the ears, tiredness and a feeling of being generally unwell.

## What causes sinusitis?

Most cases of sinusitis occur after a cold or flu-like illness. Very occasionally infection can spread to the sinuses from an infected tooth. Additional factors that make people more open to infection include:

- Smoking.
- Asthma and other underlying lung diseases.
- A weakened immune system.

## Do I need antibiotics?

Sinusitis is usually caused by a virus and most people will not need antibiotics. The immune system will usually clear the infection by itself.

## What treatment should I take?

Some treatments may help relieve your symptoms including;

- Paracetamol and ibuprofen to relieve pain and bring down any temperature.
- Decongestants and nasal sprays can help relieve a blocked nose.
- Steam inhalation may help. There is a debate about how effective this is and there is a risk of scalding.

## When should I seek medical advice?

- If your symptoms last more than 2 weeks.
- If your symptoms are severe and you are very unwell.
- If you have another illness such as heart problems, diabetes or a weakened immune system.
- If you have repeated bouts of infection.
- If you develop redness or swelling of your eyelid or cheek.

# Treatment for Common Cold



A cold is an infection of the nose and upper airways caused by a virus. Many different viruses can cause a cold. This is why colds can recur and immunisation against colds is not possible. Children tend to have more colds than adults as adults have built up immunity to many viruses. Adults have an average of 2-4 colds per year whilst young children may have 3-8 colds per year. Smoking increases your chances of getting a cold.

## What are the symptoms of a common cold?

- A blocked, runny nose and sneezing.
- A clear discharge from the nose which may become thick and yellow/ green after 2-3 days.
- Sore throat, hoarseness of voice and mild earache.
- Mild fever (37-38°C).
- Coughing.
- Headache and tiredness.

Symptoms of a cold can last up to 10 days although they often peak after 2-3 days. A cough may linger up to 3 weeks.

## What treatment should I take?

There is no magic cure for the common cold! Antibiotics will not help as they do not kill viruses. Any treatment is aimed at reducing the symptoms of the cold whilst your immune system kills the virus. The most useful treatments are:

- Paracetamol or ibuprofen to ease fever, sore throats, aches and pains.
- Drink plenty of fluids to stop becoming dehydrated.
- Rest as much as possible.
- Stop smoking if at all possible.
- Steam inhalations may help 'clear' the nose.
- 'Cold remedies' containing decongestants may be helpful for some people.

## When should I come and see a doctor?

Most colds do not cause complications. However you should seek medical help if:

- Your temperature is above 38°C.
- You develop sharp chest pain on breathing in.
- You cough up blood stained mucus.
- You are increasingly breathless and wheezy.
- Your cough lasts longer than 3 weeks.
- Other people notice you become disorientated or confused.
- You have any symptoms that you cannot explain and are concerned about.

# Treatment for Conjunctivitis



Conjunctivitis refers to inflammation of the conjunctiva (the front 'skin' of the eye). The inflammation can be due to an infection, an irritant (e.g. shampoo) or an allergic reaction (e.g. pollen). This leaflet is about conjunctivitis caused by infection.

## What are the symptoms of infective conjunctivitis?

- Reddening of the eyes.
- Watering eyes.
- Soreness.
- Sticky eyes.

## What causes infective conjunctivitis?

There are 2 common causes:

- Viruses.
- Bacteria.

It is difficult for the GP to tell the difference between a viral and bacterial infection. Both types of infection will normally get better without the need for any specific treatment within 1 week.

## Do I need antibiotics?

Infective conjunctivitis does not usually need medical treatment. The infection should clear up within 1-2 weeks following the advice below:

- Remove contact lenses until all the symptoms have cleared.
- Clean away the stickiness from your eyelids and eyelashes using cotton wool soaked in water.
- Wash your hands regularly to limit the spread of infection and do not share towels and pillows.
- Lubricant eye drops available from your pharmacy may help to ease the soreness in your eyes.

## When should I contact the doctor?

You will need to contact your doctor if you experience any of the following symptoms:

- Marked eye pain.
- Photophobia (sensitivity to light).
- Reduced vision.
- Intense redness in your eyes.
- No improvement of symptoms after 1 week.

# Treatment for Hay Fever



Hay fever is very common. It affects about 2 in 10 people in the UK and often first develops in school aged children. Hay fever tends to run in families. You are also more likely to develop hay fever if you already have asthma or eczema. Hay fever is caused by an allergy to pollen. Pollen is the name given to the fine powder that is produced by plants, trees or flowers to fertilise other plants, trees or flowers of the same species.

**Tree** pollens tend to affect people from March to May. **Grass** pollen tends to affect people every year in the grass pollen season from about May to July. Other people may be allergic to **weed** pollens from spring to early autumn.

## The symptoms of hay fever are:

- Runny, itchy and/or blocked nose. Sneezing.
- Itchy, red or watering eyes.
- Itchy throat.
- **Less common symptoms** - loss of smell, face pain, sweats, and headache.

## Advice for hay fever sufferers:

Whilst it is difficult to totally avoid pollen, the following may help when pollen count is high:

- Stay indoors as much as possible, and keep windows and doors shut.
- Avoid cutting grass, spending time in large grassy places and camping.
- Shower and wash your hair after being outdoors.
- Wear wrap-around sunglasses when you are out.
- Keep car windows closed, and consider using/maintaining a pollen filter for the air vents in your car.

## Self-treatment for hay fever:

- Antihistamine nasal sprays can rapidly ease itching, sneezing and watering. Antihistamines work by blocking the action of histamine. This is one of the chemicals involved in allergy reactions.
- Antihistamines taken by mouth (tablets or liquid medicine) can ease most of the symptoms but may not be so good at relieving a blocked nose with hayfever. There are several different antihistamines available and you can get advice from a pharmacist. If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, it is advised to try to avoid antihistamines if possible.
- A steroid nasal spray usually works well to help the nasal symptoms and can also help eye symptoms. It takes several days at least for a steroid spray to build up to its full effect, so persevere. (It is best to start taking it a few weeks before the hay fever season is likely to begin if you know that you have hay fever). It can also be used in addition to antihistamines if symptoms are not fully controlled by either alone.
- Eye drops are available over the counter (OTC) to treat the hay fever symptoms that affect your eyes, such as redness, itchiness and watering. Eye drops containing the active ingredient sodium cromoglicate are the most commonly used.

## When should I come to see the Doctor?

- Severe symptoms that haven't responded to the measures listed above.
- Symptoms you don't feel are related to hay fever or other concerns.

# Treatment for Nappy Rashes



Most babies develop a nappy rash at some stage. Usually it is mild and does not bother the baby. Most cases are due to a reaction of the skin to urine and stool motions (faeces). In addition, a germ called Candida commonly thrives on the inflamed skin. (This is the germ that causes thrush).

## What can I do to prevent or clear a nappy rash?

- **Leave the nappy off as much as possible** to let fresh air get to the skin. Try letting the baby lie without a nappy on a towel or disposable absorbent sheet for a while each day.
- **Change the nappy often.** Ideally, change the nappy as soon as it is wet or soiled.
- **Wash the baby's bottom with water only.** Soaps may irritate the skin, so water alone is best. Non-alcoholic 'wet wipes' are an alternative if you are out.
- **After washing, make sure the baby's bottom is properly dry** before putting on a new nappy. Dry by patting, not by rubbing, with a towel.
- **Barrier creams or ointments** e.g. Sudocrem that you can buy from pharmacies may help to protect the skin from moisture. Ideally, rub on a thin layer of barrier cream or ointment just before putting on each nappy.

## When should I come and see a Health Visitor, Nurse Practitioner (if aged over 3 months) or the Doctor about a nappy rash?

- If the rash becomes worse.
- If there are other concerns.

# Treatment for Insect Bites & Stings



An insect bite is a puncture wound caused by an insect such as bee or wasp. Fluid in the insect bite produces local inflammation reaction and sometimes body wide effects. Most insects in the UK do not transmit diseases. The main exception to this is a type of tick which can cause Lyme disease.

## The symptoms of an insect bite:

- Pain sometimes from the bite mark.
- Irritation and itch over the site of the bite.
- A small itchy lump which may develop up to 24 hours after a bite. This typically lasts for several days before fading away. Sometimes there maybe redness around the lump.
- A weal which is like a small fluid-filled lump and is very itchy. It may develop immediately after being bitten. A weal lasts about 2 hours, but is often followed by a small itchy solid lump. This can last for several days before fading away.

## Self-treatment after such a bite:

- If there is a localised allergic reaction take an antihistamine immediately. Continue these until any swelling stops. (Antihistamines block the action of histamine which is a chemical that is released by the body during allergic reactions).
- Use a cold compress to ease pain and to help reduce swelling. (Don't use ice if you have skin numbness problems as you may not feel the cold).
- Painkillers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen can help to ease the pain. Ibuprofen should be used with caution if you have a history of asthma or indigestion. Please check with your pharmacist if you have any concerns.

## When should I see the doctor after an insect bite?

- If the swelling is severe.
- Infection is not common but may be suggested by increased pain and swelling at the site of the sting/bite.
- If you feel you have been bitten by a tick as this may cause Lyme disease.
- In malarial areas abroad and have been bitten by a mosquito.
- Symptoms of a generalised allergic reaction develop:
  1. Itchy skin in many parts of the body with or without an itchy blotchy rash.
  2. Swelling of your face which may extend to the lips, tongue, throat, and upper airway.
  3. Wheezing or difficulty in breathing.

**\*\* In the event of numbers 2 & 3 above occurring, consider calling for 999 immediately \*\***

# Treatment of sickness bug (gastroenteritis)

Gastroenteritis is a common infection of the gut. Many viruses, bacteria and other germs can cause gastroenteritis. A virus is the most common cause of gastroenteritis. Viruses are easily spread from one person to another. This is often because of the virus being present on people's hands after they have been to the toilet. Food poisoning causes some cases of gastroenteritis. Investigations are not usually needed.

## The usual symptoms:

- Diarrhoea.
- Sickness and / or vomiting.
- Abdominal (tummy) pains usually crampy in nature.
- Fever.
- Dehydration symptoms: tiredness, dizziness, headache, muscular cramps, sunken eyes, passing little urine, dry mouth and tongue, weakness, and becoming irritable.



## Self-management of gastroenteritis:

Symptoms often settle within a few days as your immune system clears the infection.

- Diarrhoea and vomiting may cause dehydration (a lack of fluid in the body). Mild dehydration is common and is usually easily reversed by drinking lots of fluids. If you vomit, wait 5-10 minutes and then start drinking again, but more slowly. For example, a small sip every 2-3 minutes.
- Rehydration drinks are recommended for people who are frail or who have underlying health problems. They are available from pharmacies. Rehydration drinks provide a good balance of water, salts, and sugar.
- It is advised to eat small, light meals if you can. Be guided by your appetite. You may not feel like food and most adults can do without food for a few days. Plain foods such as whole meal bread and biscuits can be tried first.
- Anti-diarrhoea drugs are not recommended to children under 12 years or pregnant ladies. Also, don't use anti-diarrhoea drugs if you pass blood with the diarrhoea nor if you have a high temperature. People with other conditions should not take loperamide (Brand name "Imodium"). So please read the information leaflet that comes with the medicine before taking loperamide.

## Preventing spread of infection to others:

- Wash your hands thoroughly after going to the toilet and before eating. Don't share towels or flannels.
- Best to avoid preparing or serving food for others.
- Regularly clean the toilets that you use at least once a day.
- Stay of work, college, etc, until at least 48 hours after the last episode of diarrhoea or vomiting.

## When should I consult a nurse practitioner or a doctor:

- If you suspect that you are becoming dehydrated.
- If you have blood in your diarrhoea or vomit.
- If you have severe symptoms or if you feel that your condition is getting worse.
- Infections caught abroad.
- If you are elderly or have an underlying health problem such as diabetes.
- If your occupation is a food handler. Special clearance may be needed to be given before a return to work.

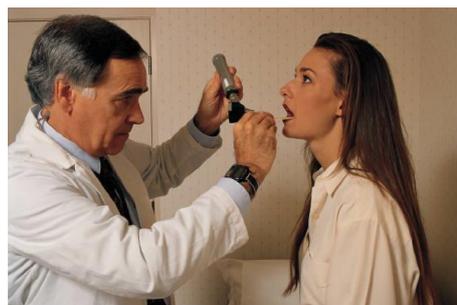
# Treatment for Sore Throat

Sore throats are very common. They can be caused by either bacteria or viruses. Most sore throats are not serious and will clear up without any specific medical treatment. The average duration of a sore throat is 7 days.

## What are the symptoms?

There are a number of symptoms which can include;

- Painful feeling at the back of the throat.
- Tenderness in the glands of the neck.
- Discomfort on swallowing.
- High temperature.
- Aching.
- Headache.
- Tiredness.
- Mild cough.
- Hoarse voice.



## Do I need antibiotics?

The use of antibiotics is not recommended for most sore throats because:

- Most sore throats are caused by viruses.
- Even if a sore throat is caused by bacteria you will not get better any quicker and may experience side effects.
- Over-using antibiotics to treat minor illnesses make them less effective for life-threatening illnesses.

## What treatment should I take?

Sore throats are not usually serious and will pass in a week. Paracetamol or ibuprofen will help to ease the pain and reduce any fever. Adults may find sucking throat lozenges can offer additional relief. It is also important to keep drinking plenty of fluids.

## When should I come and see the doctor?

You will need to come and see the doctor if your symptoms have not improved after 1 week. If your immunity is lowered you will also need to see the doctor.

## When should I seek earlier medical advice?

You should seek medical advice if:

- You have a persistent fever (temperature above 38°C).
- You have difficulty breathing.
- You have difficulty swallowing saliva or fluids.
- You have any symptoms that you cannot explain and are concerned about.

# Treatment for Sprains & Strains



Sprains and strains are a very common type of injury that affects the muscles and ligaments. Ligaments are strong bands of tissue around joints that connect one bone to another. They help to keep the bones together and stable. Muscles allow movement between joints. A **sprain** occurs when one or more of your ligaments have been stretched, twisted, or torn. A **strain** occurs when the muscle fibers stretch or tear.

## Symptoms of sprains and strains include:

- Pain.
- Swelling and inflammation.
- Loss of movement in the affected body part.

## The most common types of muscle strains are:

- **Hamstring strains** - the hamstrings are muscles that run down the back of the leg and are connected to the hip and knee joints.
- **Gastrocnemius and soleus strains** - the calf muscles.
- **Quadriceps strains** - muscles located at the front of the thigh.
- **Lumbar strains** - the lumbar muscles are found in the lower back.

## Self-treatment for ligament sprains & muscle strains:

- Rest, ice, compression of the affected area and elevation (“RICE” tips).
- Avoid heat, alcohol and massage in the first 72 hours after the injury. Heat and massage in the early stages of an injury may increase any bleeding into the tissues and can lead to more swelling. However, after the first 72 hours, no further inflammation is likely to develop and then heat / gentle massage may then be soothing.
- Consider taking paracetamol for pain or using an anti-inflammatory cream/gel to the affected area. Or consider using an oral anti-inflammatory tablet. Ibuprofen should be used with caution if you have a history of asthma or indigestion. Please check with your pharmacist if you have any concerns.
- For ligament sprains: avoid immobilising the joint. Begin moving the affected joint as soon as it can be tolerated without excessive pain.
- For muscle strains: avoid over using the injured muscle for the first few days after the injury to allow inflammation to reduce.

## When should I come and see the doctor?

- Lack of expected improvement after trying basic home management.
- Worsening of symptoms e.g. increased pain.
- Any other concern.