

# #HELPMYNHS



## Help my GP

A visit to your GP is sometimes unavoidable...but do you really need to see them?

Some people visit their GP when they could have cared for themselves at home or received care elsewhere. This makes GP surgeries very busy and means you and other people may have to wait longer when you do need to see a GP.

You can find advice on what you can do to avoid having to see your GP in the leaflet below:

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- [NHS choices](#)
- [Sign up for GP online Services](#)
- [Go to your local Pharmacy](#)
- [Order repeat prescriptions online](#)
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## Stay well

There are many ways you can stay well to help you stop becoming ill:

- **Having your flu jab and other vaccinations** is a quick and easy way to stop you becoming ill and spreading illnesses to others.
- **Keeping your first aid kit and medicines cabinet well stocked at home** will help you treat illnesses quickly yourself and mean you do not need to see your doctor.
- **Stay warm, particularly during the winter months** as cold weather can affect your health.
- **Sleeping well, exercising regularly and eating the right food** will help you stay healthy and stop you becoming ill.

You can get lots more information on staying well at [www.nhs.uk/staywell](http://www.nhs.uk/staywell)

## NHS Choices

**NHS Choices** is the biggest health website in the UK and is tried and trusted by doctors. It helps you:

- Check your symptoms to see if you need further treatment
- Better understand your health so you can stay well
- Find out what services are available if you need treatment or support
- Get advice on how to care for yourself when you do become ill or unwell

## Sign up for GP online services

Sign up to GP online services and you'll be able to use a website or app without leaving your home to:

- Book or cancel appointments online with a GP or nurse
- Order repeat prescriptions online
- View parts of your GP record, including information about medication, allergies, vaccinations, previous illnesses and test results

- View clinical correspondence such as hospital discharge summaries, outpatient appointment letters and referral letters

The service is free and available to everyone who is registered with a GP. The services available to you will depend on the online system your GP practice uses. You can ask your practice about getting online access to their services.

## Go to your local pharmacy

Pharmacists have the knowledge and skills to help and advise you on treating common conditions, and how to use the medicines you have at home. They can inform you of local services that are available. There are many local pharmacies in high streets, some supermarkets and in shopping centres. You don't need an appointment to see the pharmacist, just pop in.

Pharmacies do more than dispense prescriptions and medicines. Many also offer:

- Advice on bugs and viruses, minor ailments, tummy troubles, skin conditions and allergies
- Women's health advice
- Treatment for common childhood illnesses and infections
- Health checks (blood pressure, cholesterol or blood glucose testing)
- Screening (chlamydia and allergy screenings)
- Emergency contraception
- Pregnancy testing
- Stop smoking treatment
- Weight management advice

Many pharmacies are open late nights and at the weekend, which is convenient for people who work and if you or any member of your family feels unwell.

Details of opening times can be found at: [www.nhs.uk/chemist](http://www.nhs.uk/chemist)

## Order repeat prescriptions on time

Make sure you order repeat prescriptions in plenty of time so you don't have to rush to your GP at the last minute. This is especially important before holiday periods.

## Buy common medicines over-the-counter

Consider buying some common medicines at your local pharmacy or shop rather than getting them on prescription. It will be quicker for you to get the medicine and free up time for GP appointments that can be used for other people with serious health problems.

Examples of what can be purchased from your local pharmacy or supermarket are:

- Allergy medicines
- Simple pain killers like paracetamol and ibuprofen
- Sore throat, coughs, colds and flu medications
- Anti-diarrhoea medication
- Rehydration salts
- First aid kit including plasters and bandages
- Thermometer

## The doctor will see you now...but are you ready for your appointment?

If you do need to see your doctor, it is important that you prepare for the appointment to help you and your GP get the most out of your time together. Here are ten practical things you can do:

1. Sign up for GP online services to book appointments without having to phone
2. Turn up to appointments on time and cancel appointments you don't need to ensure you and others get the most time possible with their GP
3. Ask for longer appointments if you have more than one problem to give you more time to talk them through.
4. Write down your symptoms and when they started/occurred so you can tell your GP exactly what the issue is
5. Write down any questions and worries you want to ask the GP so you do not forget
6. Bring a list of medication you are taking and any other relevant documents to help your GP know everything you are taking
7. Tell your GP about the most important things first, don't leave your main concern to the end
8. Bring a friend or carer if you need support so they can help you understand or explain what the doctor is telling you
9. Don't be afraid to ask your GP to explain if you do not understand what they say – make sure you know the next steps before you leave the room
10. Consider seeing a practice nurse who can often deal with your concern without you having to wait to see a GP - just ask

**Be Self Care Aware**

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## Stay Well This Winter

Winter conditions can be seriously bad for our health, especially for people aged 65 or older, and people with long-term conditions such as COPD, bronchitis, emphysema, asthma, diabetes or heart or kidney disease.

Being cold can raise the risk of increased blood pressure, heart attacks and strokes.

The cold and damp weather, ice, snow and high winds can all aggravate any existing health problems and make us more vulnerable to respiratory winter illnesses. But there are lots of things you can do to stay well this winter.

### **Feeling unwell? Don't wait – get advice from your nearest pharmacist**

At the first sign of a winter illness, even if it's just a cough or cold, get advice from your pharmacist, before it gets more serious. Act quickly.

The sooner you get advice from a pharmacist the better. Pharmacists are fully qualified to advise you on the best course of action. This can be the best and quickest way to help you recover and get back to normal.

If you can't get to a pharmacist yourself, ask someone to go for you or call your local pharmacy.

### **Make sure you get your flu jab**

The flu virus strikes in winter and it can be far more serious than you think. Flu can lead to serious complications such as bronchitis and pneumonia, and it can be deadly.

That's why the flu jab is free if you're aged 65 or over, or if you have a long-term health condition. If you have children or grandchildren aged two or three, they are eligible for a free flu vaccination. Any child in school years reception to five will be vaccinated at school.

And if you are the main carer of an older or disabled person you may also be eligible for the free flu jab. Just speak to your GP.

You can also find more information at [www.nhs.uk/getflujab](http://www.nhs.uk/getflujab) Also, don't forget that if you're aged 65 or over, you are eligible for the pneumococcal vaccine, which will help protect you from pneumococcal diseases such as pneumonia. Ask your GP.

## Staying warm in cold weather

It is important to keep warm in winter – both inside and outdoors. Keeping warm over the winter months can help to prevent colds, flu and more serious health problems such as heart attacks, strokes, pneumonia and depression.

- **Heat your home to at least 18°C (65°F).**
  - You might prefer your main living room to be slightly warmer.
- **Keep your bedroom window closed on winter nights.**
  - Breathing cold air can be bad for your health as it increases the risk of chest infections.
- **Keep active when you're indoors.**
  - Try not to sit still for more than an hour or so. Wear several layers of light clothes. Several layers trap warm air better than one bulky layer.
- **Make sure you're receiving all the help that you're entitled to.**
  - Learn how to make your home more energy efficient, improve your heating and keep up with your energy bills at [www.gov.uk/phe/keep-warm](http://www.gov.uk/phe/keep-warm)
- **And check your heating and cooking appliances are safe.**
  - Contact a Gas Safe registered engineer to make sure they're operating properly. Visit [www.gassaferegister.co.uk](http://www.gassaferegister.co.uk)

## Check your medicine cabinet

Ask your pharmacist what medicines should be in your cabinet to help get you and your family through the winter season.

Many over-the-counter medicines (including paracetamol and ibuprofen) are available to relieve symptoms of common winter ailments, such as colds, sore throat, cough, sinusitis or painful middle ear infection (earache).

So talk to your pharmacist for advice on getting the relief you need.

To manage winter illness symptoms at home:

- Rest
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Have at least one hot meal a day to keep your energy levels up
- Use over-the-counter medications to help give relief.

## Prescriptions

Make sure you get your prescription medicines before your pharmacy or GP practice closes for Christmas.

You can also order your repeat prescriptions online. To sign up to GP online services ask at your practice or to find out more visit [nhs.uk/GPonlineservices](https://www.nhs.uk/GPonlineservices)

And, if you've been prescribed antibiotics or any other medication, **make sure you take them as directed.**

## Look out for other people

Remember that other people, such as older neighbours, friends and family members, may need a bit of extra help over the winter. There's a lot you can do to help people who are more frail than you.

Icy pavements and roads can be very slippery and cold weather can stop people from getting out and about. Keep in touch with your friends, neighbours and family and ask if they need any practical help, or if they're feeling under the weather.

Make sure they're stocked up with enough food supplies for a few days, in case they can't go out. If they do need to go out in the cold, encourage them to wear shoes with a good grip and a scarf around the mouth to protect them from the cold air, and to reduce their risk of chest infections.

And make sure they get any prescription medicines before the Christmas holidays start and if bad weather is forecast.

If they need help over the holiday period when the GP practice or pharmacy is closed, call NHS 111 and speak to a call adviser who will be able to direct you to a local service that is open. You can also find information at [www.nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk)

## **Five things we recommend you do**

1. Make sure you get your flu jab.
2. Keep your home at 18°C (65°F) or higher if you can.
3. Take advantage of financial schemes and discounts to help you pay for heating.
4. Visit your local pharmacist as soon as you start to feel unwell with the symptoms of a respiratory winter illness.
5. Look out for other people who may need a bit of extra help over the winter.