

Back Pain

The spine supports the whole weight of the upper body so it is understandable that it sometimes goes wrong. Because of the complex nature of the spine it is advisable to consult your doctor if back pain persists for more than a few days. If, as is usual, the pain has been caused by abuse, i.e. lifting too heavy weights etc, be sensible and take things easy. If you are able to, take aspirin or paracetamol which will not only relieve the pain but will help to relieve inflammation. Your doctor may well prescribe stronger drugs, heat treatment, gentle exercise or some kind of supportive corset.

Burns

Apply large quantities of cold water to the affected area as soon as possible and maintain this until the pain subsides. This may take as long as 20 minutes. If the skin is unbroken but blistered apply a loose dry dressing. If the burn is large or if the skin is broken, consult your doctor. If the skin is broken, cover with Clingfilm and consult the doctor.

Chickenpox

On the first day a rash appears as small red patches. Within a few hours of these developing, small blisters appear in the centre of these patches. During the next three to four days further patches occur and the earlier ones turn crusty and fall off. Calamine lotion may be applied to soothe the often severe itching. Cool baths may also help.

The most infectious period is from two to three days before the rash appears and up to five days after. Children may return to school as soon as the last crusts have fallen off. There is no need to see a doctor for confirmation of diagnosis.

Colds

There is no magic cure for the common cold. Take plenty of drinks. If you have a headache or are feverish, take aspirin (if over the age of 16, and provided you are able to take it) or paracetamol. Antibiotics will not help, unless you happen to have a secondary bacterial infection.

Coughs

Dry coughs usually cure themselves and can be eased by medicine from the chemist. Children with colds often cough at night and this may be eased by propping them up with a pillow.

Decongestant measures may help.

Diarrhoea

In adults, diarrhoea is usually caused by a viral infection and therefore cannot be treated directly. Holiday diarrhoea is often due to bacteria. Consult your doctor if the symptoms persist for more than a few days. Diarrhoea in very young children and babies needs careful attention. Most babies have loose bowel action during their first six months due to their predominantly liquid diet.

Gastroenteritis

Gastroenteritis describes a group of diseases affecting the stomach or part of the intestine. Symptoms are often diarrhoea, sickness and stomach ache. Because the lining of the stomach is likely to be inflamed medicines are often immediately vomited up. Large quantities of water, orange juice or thin soup should be taken to counter the effects of dehydration.

Consult your doctor if symptoms persist for more than two days, or for babies or young children, one day.

Minor Cuts And Grazes

Wash the wound thoroughly with water and a little soap. To stop bleeding apply a clean handkerchief or dressing and press firmly to the wound for about five minutes. Cover with a clean dry dressing.

Sunburn

Treat as for other burns with cold water to remove heat. Calamine lotion will relieve the irritation whilst paracetamol will also help. Children are particularly susceptible to sunburn and great care should be taken to avoid over-exposure to the harmful effects of the sun.

Insect Bites and Stings

Antihistamine tablets can be obtained from the chemist without prescription and will usually relieve most symptoms. Note: bee stings should be scraped away rather than 'plucked' in order to avoid squeezing the contents of the venom sac into the wound.

Sore Throat

Almost always caused by a virus, antibiotics therefore have no place in the treatment. Generally a sore throat lasts two to five days. The best treatment for adults is to gargle with soluble aspirin (if you are able to take it) and then swallow it, four times daily.

Remember that children under 16 should not be given aspirin. Plenty of cold drinks and paracetamol regularly will help.

Nose Bleeds

Sit in a chair, leaning forward with your mouth open and pinch your nose just below the bone for approximately 30 minutes, by which time the bleeding should have stopped. Avoid hot drinks or hot food for 24 hours. If symptoms persist consult your doctor.
