**Our Doctor Writes - November 2023**

**Help, I need Somebody**

General Practice has changed considerably since I became a GP 22 years ago. The increased demand for routine, pre-booked appointments has meant that service provision has had to adapt. In 2017 the majority of practices were no longer funded to provide emergency visits, walk-in and minor injury care. Patients were directed, and have continued to be directed, to the most appropriate service.

Here is a brief guide of how to get the help you need.

**Self help**

Millions of GP appointments are requested for minor health problems which are self-limiting and will resolve without seeing a Doctor or Nurse. There is a lot of information available to help manage minor illnesses and injuries online, also by visiting your local Pharmacy. As qualified healthcare professionals, Pharmacists can offer clinical advice and over-the-counter medicines for a range of minor illnesses at any time - you don't need an appointment.

Over the counter medicines are available for common conditions such as:

* headaches, migraines
* aches and pains, sprains
* sore throat, coughs, common cold, flu, sinusitis, earache, hayfever
* cystitis, thrush, painful periods
* skin rashes, eczema, fungal nails, athlete’s foot
* conjunctivitis, cold sores
* heart burn/indigestion, diarrhoea, vomiting, constipation, piles
* head lice, worms, teething
* childhood fevers, chicken pox

For all the above there is information available on the NHS website. The condition leaflets on Patient.info are also very informative. You own GP’s website will have information about minor illnesses and how to self-manage. There are private GP consultations available online, for example thegpservice.co.uk.

**Pharmacist**

Pharmacists also offer advice about prescribed medications and some are able to prescribe. A Pharmacist can offer free, confidential consultations in a room where examinations can take place. Again, you do not need an appointment. This is helpful for situations where emergency contraception is required or you want to know more about medication available over the counter for erectile dysfunction. Increasingly pharmacists are supporting GPs and last year, when demand for appointments was exceptionally high in the Christmas and New Year period, many of you were directed to a Pharmacist.

Antibiotics cannot be bought over the counter, but some Pharmacists can prescribe. Many of the larger Pharmacies (Boots, Superdrug, Lloyds) offer online assessments by a doctor and can provide prescriptions and delivery of medicines. This service is not free.

**Do I need antibiotics ?**

Sore throats, common colds, coughs, earaches and sinusitis are usually caused by viral infections that antibiotics will not treat. A cough usually settles on its own within 3 to 4 weeks. Viruses cause acute bronchitis. This is a temporary inflammation of the upper chest airways resulting in increased mucus production. Your body tries to shift this extra mucus through coughing. In addition to coughing, you may feel wheezy and a little more short of breath. Your chest and abdominal muscles may ache because of coughing, which is often worse on lying down and keep you and your family awake at night. You can usually go about your normal activities, although you may be more tired and less hungry. You should not have a temperature/fever after the first few days. Acute bronchitis is more common in winter and can affect people of all ages, but mostly affects children under five. Antibiotics are not required to treat acute bronchitis. Older people, patients on drugs which suppress the immune system (eg chemotherapy, rheumatoid arthritis drugs), patients with chronic lung and heart conditions and smokers are more vulnerable to develop lower chest infections (pneumonia) caused by bacteria which antibiotics will treat. If your cough is present for more than 6 weeks, especially if you are a smoker, you should see your GP to exclude another cause for your cough.

**Minor Injury Units**

GP surgeries do not provide a minor injuries service. You need to attend an MIU.

Minor injuries include things like:

* sprains and strains eg ankle and back
* suspected broken bones (wrist, hand, fingers, ankle, foot, toes)
* cuts, bruises
* wound and skin infections
* minor burns and scalds
* minor head injuries
* insect and animal bites
* minor eye injuries
* injuries to the back, shoulder and chest
* minor injuries due to road traffic accidents

**NHS 111 -phone or online**

**If you need help or you are unsure what help you need but it is a non-life-threatening situation you should use the NHS 111 service.**

This is a triage service and depending on what you need, you might be advised to:

* call 999 or go to A&E
* go to an urgent treatment centre eg a Minor Injury Unit (MIU) or walk-in centre
* contact your own GP Surgery
* see an evening and weekend GP (out-of-hours GP)
* book a callback from a Nurse
* get urgent specialist support, for dental, mental health problems, sexually transmitted infections
* see a Pharmacist for help with a minor illness
* look after yourself safely at home

**999**

**If you think it's a life-threatening emergency call 999 or go to Accident and Emergency.**

Ambulance control categorises calls depending on severity and responds accordingly.

* Category ONE: for life-threatening injuries and illnesses, specifically cardiac arrest, heart attack and severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis).  In children fit, limp/floppy, difficulty breathing, blue, pale, grey or blotchy skin and difficulty staying awake.
* Category TWO: for emergency calls, such as stroke patients, fits, severe difficulty breathing.
* Category THREE: for urgent calls such as abdominal pains which will include patients to be treated in their own home or being redirected to their GP/GP out of hours service.
* Category FOUR: less urgent calls such as diarrhoea, vomiting and back pain. Most of these patients will be given advice over the telephone or referred to another service such as a GP/GP out of hours service.

I hope this helps you find the right service if you are unwell, especially as the winter is approaching and the pressure on all NHS services is unprecedented.

Happy Christmas

Keep well

Dr Angela Paddon and the team at The Old School Surgery