27 September 2013

Keep Well this Winter – Prevention is Better than Cure

It’s Flu Jab time again!

Annual flu vaccination is available free to the following high-risk people, to protect them from flu:

- people aged 65 or over
- pregnant women
- people with a serious medical condition
- people living in a residential or nursing home
- carers of people at risk of complications of the flu
- healthcare professionals

Clinic Dates

If you fall into one of the categories above please contact the practice to make your appointment for a flu jab. **We currently have plenty of room in our Saturday clinic.** Come along to that clinic, meet up with Age UK and Bucks Fire Service and have a coffee with FOSS.

- Saturday 12 October  appointments still available from 10:30
- Wednesday 16 October appointments still available from 11:45
- Tuesday 29 October appointments still available from 17:00
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Do we have your mobile number?

Please take a moment to check that we have your current mobile number.

We are now able to text you appointment confirmations, appointment reminders, invitations to clinics for example annual health checks, flu appointments and so on.

Benefits of Texting:

- Timely and accurate appointment confirmations
- An appointment reminder the day before your booked appointment
- Prompt invitations to clinics as they become available
- Texting is fast
- Texting is low cost to the practice - money saved on postage can be better spent within the practice
- You can be advised of cancelled appointments within minutes of a problem arising
- We can advise you of updates and enhancements to services
- If we need to contact you urgently, but just can’t get hold of you on the telephone a text can be sent asking you to contact the practice.

Our assurances to you:

- We only send generic information to your nominated number - no confidential or sensitive information will ever be send via a text
- We will never give your contact details to an outside organisation without your permission
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The Winter Bugs are already on their way!

We are already seeing the start of the winter bugs. Demand for consultations about mild to moderate ailments are increasing day by day at present and obviously having an impact on consultation time.

With that in mind, here are some hits and tips for dealing with some of our annual ailments which may present you having to consult with your GP:

Treating a common cold

Self care

In most cases, you will be able to treat the symptoms of cold yourself at home by using a number of self-care techniques. These are listed below.

- Drink plenty of fluids to replace any fluids you may have lost due to sweating and having a runny nose.
- Get plenty of rest: there’s no official guidance as to how long a person should stay off work or out of school. Most people usually know when they’re fit enough to return to normal activities.
- Eat healthily: a low-fat, high-fibre diet is recommended, including plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables (five portions a day).

Many children will lose their appetite when they have a cold. However, this is perfectly normal and it should only last for a few days. It’s recommended that children with a cold only eat when they’re hungry.

The remedies outlined below may also help to relieve your symptoms.

Steam inhalation

Steam inhalation involves sitting with your head over a bowl of hot water. Place a towel over your head, close your eyes and breathe deeply. Avoid getting the hot steam in your eyes.

The steam may help to ease your congestion by loosening mucus and making it easier to clear by blowing your nose. Adding menthol, eucalyptus, camphor, thymol or pine oil to the water may help to clear the passageways in your nose.

Steam inhalation is not advised for children due to the risk of scalding. Instead, a child may benefit from sitting in a hot, steamy bathroom.

Gargling

Gargling with salt water can sometimes help to relieve the symptoms of a sore throat and nasal congestion.
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Vapour rubs

Vapour rubs can help to soothe the symptoms of a cold in babies and young children. Apply the rub to your child’s chest and back. **Don’t apply it to their nostrils** because this could cause pain and breathing difficulties.

![Menthol sweets](image)

**Menthol sweets**

Some people find that sucking a menthol sweet can help to relieve the symptom of a sore throat.

Nasal saline drops

Nasal saline drops or sprays can help relieve the symptoms of nasal congestion in babies and young children. Nasal saline drops contain salt water so they’re thought to work in the same way as gargling salt, but they’re often better tolerated in babies and young children.

Nasal saline drops or sprays are available from most pharmacists.

**Over-the-counter cold medications**

In England, over-the-counter (OTC) cold medicines are probably the most widely used type of medication. However, there isn’t much evidence that certain OTC medications are effective.

Painkillers such as ibuprofen, paracetamol and aspirin are the only type of medication known to be effective in treating colds.

Children who are under 16 years old or women who are breastfeeding **should not take aspirin**.

Decongestants (medications designed to reduce nasal congestion) may have some limited effectiveness against colds. However, don’t use them for more than five to seven days because overuse can make the symptoms of congestion worse.

There’s no evidence to support the use of antihistamines or cough syrups in treating a cold.

Most OTC cold medications aren’t suitable for children under six years old. If your child is unwell, talk to your pharmacist about the best option if you need an OTC medication.

Many OTC medications contain a combination of different medicines; typically a painkiller, such as paracetamol, and a decongestant, such as pseudoephedrine.

If you have recently taken an OTC cold medication, it may not be safe for you to take an additional painkiller. Read the manufacturer’s patient information leaflet carefully before taking the medication, and follow the recommended dosage instructions.
More information about specific OTC medication is provided below.

**Decongestants**

Decongestants can be taken by mouth (oral decongestants) or they can be taken as a spray in your nose (nasal decongestants). They work by reducing the swelling in the passageways of your nose and they may also help to ease breathing.

There's limited evidence to show how effective decongestants are. This type of medication may only relieve cold symptoms. Also, when decongestants do work, they often only ease symptoms for a short period of time.

However, decongestants are safe and rarely cause serious side effects. If you use nasal decongestants frequently or for a long time, your congestion may end up getting worse.

Don't give any form of oral decongestant to a child under six years old, as it may cause adverse side effects.

Oral decongestants can cause a rise in blood pressure and heart rate, leading to a feeling of being more alert. Therefore, if you take OTC decongestants at bedtime, you may have problems sleeping at night. Oral decongestants, such as pseudoephedrine, phenylpropanolamine and phenylephrine are used in many OTC cold remedies.

Oral decongestants may interact with some antidepressants and beta-blockers. If you're taking either of these medicines, check with your GP or pharmacist before taking oral decongestants. If you have high blood pressure (hypertension), heart problems or glaucoma (a group of eye conditions that affect vision), check with your GP before using an oral decongestant.

Nasal decongestants work specifically on the nose. They're usually safe for adults and older children to use. Nasal decongestants, such as oxymetazoline, xylometazoline, phenylephrine and ephedrine are applied directly to the inside of the nose. They are available as nose drops or sprays.

Nasal decongestants shouldn't be used for more than five to seven days because using them for longer can actually make your congestion worse. If you're taking a type of antidepressant called a monoamine oxidase inhibitor (MAOI), you shouldn't use nasal decongestants.

**Painkillers**

Paracetamol, ibuprofen or aspirin can help to reduce a fever. They also act as painkillers (for children, use children’s liquid paracetamol). Always follow the manufacturer's instructions to ensure that the correct dose is given.

Ibuprofen and paracetamol can be taken alternately over the course of a day as long as you don’t exceed the maximum dose for each. However, children mustn’t be given both ibuprofen and paracetamol. You must either use one or the other. Using both could cause adverse side effects. Always follow the manufacturer’s instructions carefully.

Paracetamol, ibuprofen and aspirin are also included in some OTC cold remedies.
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medicines with other ingredients. Check with your pharmacist or GP before taking a cold remedy if you're taking any other painkillers.

**Don't take ibuprofen if** you have a history of stomach ulcer, indigestion, asthma or kidney disease. Aspirin should also not be taken by children who are under 16 years old or by women who are breastfeeding.

If you're pregnant, paracetamol – not ibuprofen – should be used for the short-term relief of mild to moderate pain and fever.

**What about antibiotics?**

The use of antibiotics to treat a cold is not recommended. As almost all cases of cold are caused by a viral infection, antibiotics won't have any benefit, and may cause unpleasant side effects, such as nausea and diarrhoea.

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**Winter Tummy Bugs - Adults**

**When should I seek medical advice?**

Seek medical advice in any of the following situations, or if any other symptoms occur that you are concerned about:

- If you suspect that you are becoming dehydrated. Symptoms of dehydration in adults include:
  - tiredness, dizziness or light-headedness, headache, muscular cramps, sunken eyes, passing little urine, a dry mouth and tongue, weakness, and becoming irritable.
  - Symptoms of severe dehydration in adults include:
    - weakness, confusion, rapid heart rate, coma, and a greatly reduced amount of urine that you make. This is a medical emergency and immediate medical attention is needed.
  - Dehydration in adults with acute diarrhoea is more likely to occur in:
    - Elderly or frail people.
    - Pregnant women.
    - People with severe diarrhoea and vomiting. In particular, if you are not able to replace the fluid lost with enough drinks.

- If you are vomiting a lot and unable to keep fluids down.
- If you have blood in your diarrhoea or vomit.
- If you have severe abdominal pain.
- If you have severe symptoms, or if you feel that your condition is getting worse.
- If you have a persisting high fever.
- If your symptoms are not settling - for example, vomiting for more than 1-2 days, or diarrhoea that does not start to settle after 3-4 days.
- Infections caught abroad.
- If you are elderly or have an underlying health problem such as diabetes, epilepsy, inflammatory bowel disease, kidney disease.
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- If you have a weakened immune system because of, for example, chemotherapy treatment, long-term steroid treatment, HIV infection.
- If you are pregnant.

The following are commonly advised until symptoms ease.

**Fluids - have lots to drink**

The aim is to prevent dehydration, or to treat dehydration if it has developed. (Note: if you suspect that you are dehydrated, you should contact a doctor.)

As a rough guide, drink at least 200 ml after each bout of diarrhoea (after each watery stool).

This extra fluid is in addition to what you would normally drink. For example, an adult will normally drink about two litres a day, but more in hot countries. The above advice of 200 ml after each bout of diarrhoea is in addition to this usual amount that you would drink.

If you vomit, wait 5-10 minutes and then start drinking again, but more slowly. For example, a sip every 2-3 minutes, but making sure that your total intake is as described above.

You will need to drink even more if you are dehydrated. A doctor will advise on how much to drink if you are dehydrated.

For most adults, fluids drunk to keep hydrated should mainly be water. But, ideally, include some soup. It is best not to have drinks that contain a lot of sugar, such as cola or pop, as they can sometimes make diarrhoea worse.

Rehydration drinks are recommended for people who are frail, or over the age of 60, or who have underlying health problems. They are made from sachets that you can buy from pharmacies. (The sachets are also available on prescription.) You add the contents of the sachet to water. Rehydration drinks provide a good balance of water, salts, and sugar. They do not stop or reduce diarrhoea. However, the small amount of sugar and salt helps the water to be absorbed better from the gut into the body. Do not use home-made salt/sugar drinks, as the quantity of salt and sugar has to be exact.

**Eat as normally as possible**

It used to be advised to not eat for a while if you had infectious diarrhoea. However, now 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. Eat as soon as you are able - but don’t stop drinking. If you do feel like eating, avoid fatty, spicy or heavy food at first. Plain foods such as wholemeal bread and rice are good foods to try eating first.
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Medication

Antidiarrhoeal medicines are not usually necessary. However, you may wish to reduce the number of trips that you need to make to the toilet. You can buy antidiarrhoeal medicines from pharmacies. The safest and most effective is loperamide. The adult dose of this is two capsules at first. This is followed by one capsule after each time you pass some diarrhoea, up to a maximum of eight capsules in 24 hours. It works by slowing down your gut's activity. You should not take loperamide for longer than five days.

Note: do not give antidiarrhoeal medicines to children aged under 12 years. Also, do not use antidiarrhoeal medicines if you pass blood or mucus with the diarrhoea or if you have a high temperature. People with certain conditions should not take loperamide. Therefore, read the leaflet that comes with the medicine to be safe. For example, pregnant women should not take loperamide.

Paracetamol or ibuprofen are useful to ease a high temperature or headache.

As explained above, if symptoms are severe, or persist more than several days, your doctor may ask for a sample of the diarrhoea. This is sent to the laboratory to look for infecting germs (bacteria, parasites, etc). Sometimes an antibiotic or other treatments are needed if certain bacteria or other infections are found to be the cause. Antibiotics are of no use for infectious diarrhoea caused by viruses, and may even make things worse.

END.