

Over the Counter Medicines – Consultation Closed

Every year, the CCGs in Norfolk and Waveney spend more than £5 million on prescribing items such as indigestion, heartburn, allergy treatments, vitamin supplements and cream for dry skin.

In the NHS £5 million would buy:

- 895 more hip and knee replacements
- 4025 more hernia operations
- 7005 more cataract operations
- 2220 more heart attack treatments
- 2165 more leukaemia treatments for acute myeloid

Small one-off prescriptions for items available over the counter at supermarkets and pharmacies are often prescribed for common ailments such as:

- Treatment of acute pain, such as a headache
- Management of coughs and colds
- Reducing body temperature where this is a small increase in temperature
- Treating one-off constipation and/or diarrhoea
- Treating minor abrasions or irritated skin
- Minor allergic responses
- Occurrences of head-lice infestation
- Treatment of bouts of dyspepsia resulting from over-indulgence
- Treatment of occasional vaginal thrush

These items are often available from shops or pharmacies as less expensive generic or in-store brands.

When provided on prescription, they cost the NHS significantly more. This is partly because there's much more to a prescription than just the cost of the medicines. The whole prescription journey generates costs for the NHS.

Issuing a prescription also involves:

- GP time
- Dispensers managing repeat prescriptions
- A dispensing fee charged to the NHS
- Processing at the prescriptions service in Newcastle

A significant proportion of GP appointments, GP practice and community pharmacy time is taken up in processing prescriptions for minor ailments. Currently around 20 per cent of a GP's time and 40 per cent of their total consultations are used for minor ailments and common conditions at a cost of on average £2 billion per year to the NHS.

Reducing the number of GP consultations enables GPs to focus on caring for higher risk patients, such as those with complex needs, the very young and elderly, managing long-term conditions and providing new services. However, if the GP thinks you need these items on prescription to help treat a long term condition – don't worry as you will still be able to get them that way.

What can I do to help?

- Don't ask your GP for a prescription for a minor, short-term ailment
- Ask your local pharmacist for advice
- Keep your medicine cabinet at home well-stocked so you can treat common conditions and minor ailments quickly

Engagement on this topic has now closed.

Via a survey we were interested to find out:

- How would you be affected if you were asked to buy certain over the counter medicines, instead of requesting a prescription for some minor conditions?
- How would this affect someone you know or someone you care for?
- Are there any other Over the Counter items you think we should add to the list?
- Is there anything else you would like to tell us about this?