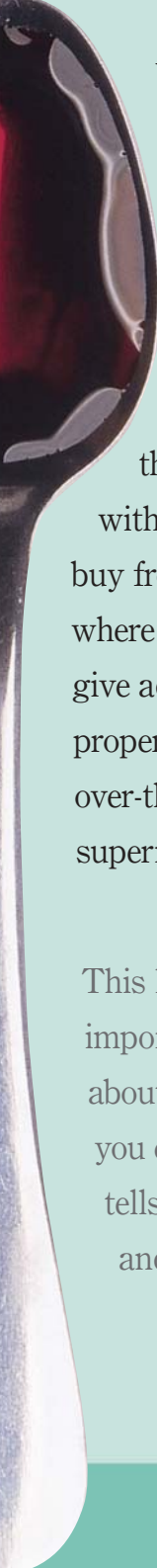


A close-up of a silver spoon filled with a dark red liquid, likely medicine, positioned horizontally across the upper part of the frame.

Getting the best


from
medicines
you buy








You can buy many medicines without needing to see your doctor. These are often called “over-the-counter” medicines. They are safe and effective as long as you follow the directions that come with them. Many medicines, that at one time you could only get with a doctor’s prescription, you can now buy from your pharmacy (or “chemists”), where a pharmacist is always on hand to give advice on how to use medicines properly. You can also buy some over-the-counter medicines in supermarkets and local shops.

This leaflet tells you some important things you should know about over-the-counter medicines, so you can get the best from them. It also tells you useful things about pharmacists and how they can help you.



Why are some over-the-counter medicines only available from the pharmacy?

Some over-the-counter medicines are classified as “Pharmacy Medicines”. This means that they can only be sold from pharmacies. They are “Pharmacy Medicines” because, either:



-  the pharmacist or medicines sales assistant may need to ask some questions to make sure that they are right for you to buy
-  they contain ingredients that may cause problems in people with certain medical conditions, e.g. diabetes, asthma, high blood pressure, or might affect other medicines that you are taking
-  they contain ingredients that might cause problems if you take too many or take them for too long. These include some painkillers and cough and cold treatments.




How do I know if a medicine is right for me and safe to use?

You should always read the information on the outside of the pack or on the leaflet if there is one. This will tell you clearly what the medicine is for, and how to use it. It will also tell you if there are special reasons why you should be careful about using it. There may even be times when you should not use it at all.

You may need to take special care because:

-  some medicines should not be used by people with certain medical conditions
-  some medicines should not be used in pregnancy or while breastfeeding


-  some medicines do not mix well with other medicines and can cause a reaction. This can happen if your medicines were bought over the counter, or prescribed by a doctor or other health professional. Always tell the pharmacist what you are taking, including herbal remedies.

If you have any doubt about whether it is all right for you to take an over-the-counter medicine, always ask the pharmacist.

What will happen if I take more than the recommended dosage for a medicine?

The correct dose of a medicine is carefully worked out to make sure that it is as effective as possible while causing the fewest side-effects or other problems. Taking more than the recommended dosage will not make it work better or faster but is likely to increase the chance of unwanted side-effects which can sometimes be unpleasant, or even dangerous. Taking less than the recommended dosage usually means that the medicine will not work as well as you expect.

What should I do if I am taking my over-the-counter medicine for longer than it says on the pack?





Never take any medicine for longer than it says on the pack. Most over-the-counter medicines are intended either to treat minor illnesses that should clear up within a few days or for those longer term conditions that can be safely treated without seeing a doctor. The information that comes with a medicine will tell you the longest time you should use it. If you feel you need to use it for longer, you should ask for advice from a pharmacist or your doctor.




If you, or someone you know, find it difficult to stop taking a medicine, you should ask a pharmacist for advice, or call one of the confidential advice lines given in this leaflet.

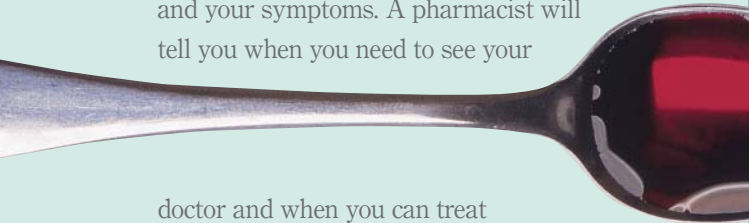
Who can I talk to if my symptoms have not gone away, or I am worried about my use of over-the-counter medicines?

If your symptoms have not gone away, you should talk to a pharmacist. However, if you prefer to speak privately over the phone there are confidential advice lines you can call:




-  **The Over-the-Counter Medicines Advice Line.** This telephone service is staffed by nurses who can give you advice. They can also give you details of other useful patient support groups and will tell you if need to speak to a pharmacist or your doctor. The service runs from 10am – 3pm on weekdays and calls are charged at normal rate.
The number is 0208 742 7042.
-  **NHS Direct.** This is a 24-hour telephone service run by the National Health Service. It is staffed by nurses who can give you advice if you are feeling ill and are unsure what to do. NHS Direct can also tell you where to find your nearest doctor, dentist or support group. Calls are charged at the same rate as local calls.
The number in England and Wales is 0845 4647.
In Scotland the service is called NHS24 and the number is 0800 224488.

Why should I use my pharmacy and ask the pharmacist for advice?

-  Pharmacists are experts on medicines.
-  Pharmacists spend five years at university and in training, and they know more about how medicines work than other health professionals.
-  Pharmacists are trained how to treat minor illness and how to tell a minor ailment from something that might be more serious. If you need an over-the-counter medicine, a pharmacist can help you choose which is the best for you and your symptoms. A pharmacist will tell you when you need to see your



doctor and when you can treat yourself with an over-the-counter medicine. They can also tell you when something should clear up on its own without needing any treatment.

-  Pharmacists are available without appointment in pharmacies to give advice.
-  Pharmacists can help you understand how to use your prescription medicines, as well as over-the-counter medicines.
-  Many over-the-counter medicines are only available from pharmacies.

Remember, if you need advice on
taking over-the-counter medicines speak
to a pharmacist, or call:

The Over-the-Counter
Medicines Advice Line:
0208 742 7042

NHS Direct England and Wales:
0845 4647

NHS24 Scotland:
0800 224488



This information
leaflet has been
produced by CHIC
(the Consumer Health
Information Centre),
an information service
to help you understand
and treat everyday
healthcare problems.