

GPs call for medicine cabinet makeover

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Nearly 100% of GPs fear patients are ill-equipped to treat minor illnesses at home – costing the NHS £2 billion a year

Most patients in the UK lack basic medicine cabinet supplies and knowledge needed to treat minor illnesses that can be easily dealt with at home, reveals a new survey of GPs.

A new study of over 100 doctors undertaken for Self Care Week (12th-18th November 2012), shows 97.6% believe patients could take more responsibility for their own health.¹ The research also found that 90% of GPs thought patients had a poorly stocked medicine cabinet in need of an overhaul, with 82.9% believing patients should also have a healthcare guide at home.¹

Doctors are now calling for patients to put aside an hour to give their medicine cabinets an emergency makeover so they can improve their ability to self care - leaving hard-pressed doctors' surgeries and A&E departments free to deal with more complex illnesses. According to Dr Paul Stillman, a Crawley GP and Self Care Forum Board member: "We are urging patients to take the first step to do this by taking a look in their medicine cabinets today to check they have everything they need for the winter months and beyond."

"Around 20% of patients don't need to see a doctor and are wasting their own time booking an appointment to ask for medication for minor ailments when they could easily treat themselves from their own medicine cabinet," says Dr Stillman, speaking at the start of the annual Self Care Week. These appointments account for 57 million GP consultations each year, taking up on average an hour per day for every GP and costing the NHS £2 billion per annum.²

This year's Self Care Week runs from 12–18th November and focuses on 'Self care for life – growing older healthily'. Run by the Self Care Forum, supported by the Department of Health, the annual campaign is designed to raise awareness of what patients can do to take better care of themselves.

Dr Stillman says: "Along with the general population, people with long-term conditions, such as diabetes or asthma, can also self care for minor complaints, but they need to know which treatments can be safely used to treat symptoms like headaches or colds and flu, without affecting their health. It's also a good time to check prescription medicines are in date."

As a result, GPs have set out a crucial checklist for what a well-stocked medicine cabinet should contain to coincide with Self Care Week.

How to give your medicine cabinet a makeover

Check you have the following basics:

- A healthcare guide
- First-aid kit including guidebook, plasters, bandages, thermometer, eyewash solution, medical tape,

tweezers, sterile dressing, antiseptic lotion/cream

- Painkillers – ibuprofen, paracetamol, aspirin
- Cold and flu remedies
- Anti-diarrhoea medicine
- Antihistamines
- Oral rehydration salts
- Indigestion remedies
- Sunscreen

References

1. Survey of 105 GPs conducted on behalf of the Self Care Forum for Self Care Week.
2. Pillay N, et al. The economic burden of minor ailments on the National Health Service (NHS) in the UK. *SelfCare* 2010;1(3):105-116.

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Notes to editors:

- Self Care Week is an annual national awareness week that focuses on embedding support for self care across communities, families and generations. This year's theme is "Self Care for Life - growing older healthily" to encourage healthy and happy living at every age.
- For more information on the work of the Self Care Forum go to www.selfcareforum.org.
- Advice for people on storing medicines safely:
 - o Keep medicines in a cool dark place, away from direct light or heat sources, such as windows or radiators. Do not keep medicines in the bathroom, even in a cabinet, as they can become hot, humid or damp.
 - o Always make sure the safety leaflets for any medications are read before taking – pharmacists can give more advice. Check any medicines already in a cabinet are still okay to use and throw out any that are past their use-by-date.
 - o Keep medicine cabinets locked and out of sight of children