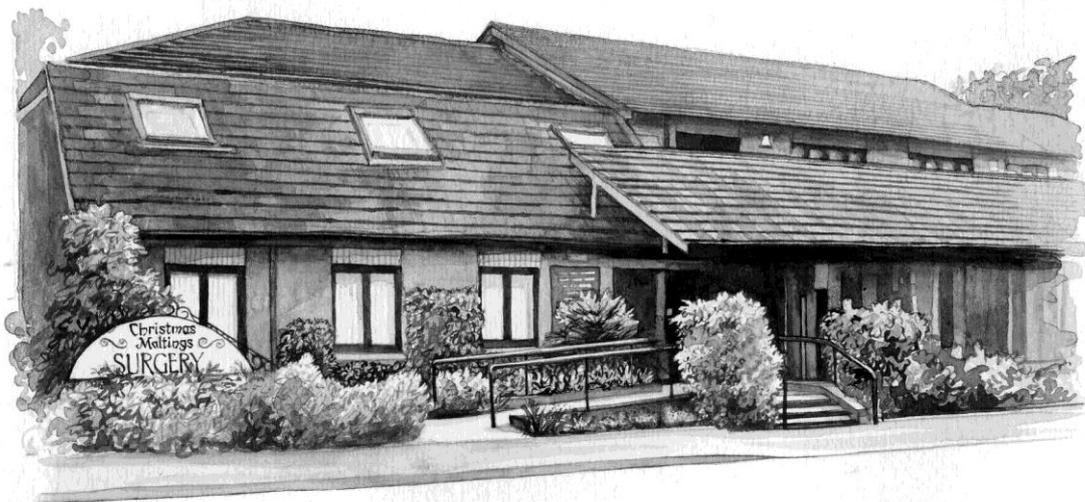


# Christmas Maltings Haverhill Surgery



**Minor illness, minor injuries and when  
to see your doctor....**

This booklet is provided by the Christmas Maltings Surgery to help you deal with minor illnesses yourself. It aims to explain some minor illnesses and injuries, suggest some simple remedies, and offer guidance about when you might need medical help.

## **What do you mean, a minor illness? It doesn't feel minor!**

A minor illness usually means one that will get better by itself, without causing any lasting harm. It doesn't mean it feels minor - it may feel very unpleasant, but there may be things that you can do to ease the symptoms.

### **Sick notes**

Doctors will only issue sick notes if your illness means you are off work for more than a week. Most of the minor illnesses in this booklet won't need more than a week off work, so if you need to take time off you can self certify. This means writing a note to your employer giving the dates for which you were off sick and the reason in brief. All employers must accept this – they cannot insist on a doctor's note if you have been off work for less than a week.

### **A note on antibiotics**

Antibiotics can sometimes seem the answer to everything, but they're really not. Antibiotics are used to treat bacterial infections – if you have a viral infection they won't work. Antibiotics are great where they're needed – but they do come at a price. When you take antibiotics you wipe out millions of friendly bacteria that live in your body and help it function effectively – particularly in the digestive system. Your doctor will never refuse you antibiotics because they cost too much – but we do try to avoid using them when we don't think they'll work.



# Viral Illnesses

## What is a virus?

Viruses are tiny organisms, much smaller than bacteria, and unlike bacteria they do not respond to antibiotics. In most cases there is nothing your doctor can prescribe to get rid of a viral illness.

## A typical viral illness

We have all experienced viral illnesses. Most begin with a temperature, which makes you feel hot, shivery, tired and unwell. After 48 hours the temperature usually passes off, and you may be left with a sore throat, a stuffy nose, sneezing and a cough, or an upset stomach. If you do nothing you'll get better - generally the whole process takes about a week from start to finish.



## Should I be at work with a viral illness?

If you don't feel well enough to do your job then you should not be at work. Most viral illnesses do not justify more than 24-48 hours absence from work. The doctor will not issue a sick note for this period (see under sick notes) but you can self certify.

## Temperatures

A temperature is part of your body's natural defence against infection – bacteria and viruses don't like temperatures any more than you do and it slows their growth. You could argue therefore that it's better to live with your temperature than to treat it – but temperatures feel unpleasant. They cause headaches and make us feel shivery, achey and unwell. Children may vomit, and babies may be irritable and refuse to feed. Paracetamol and ibuprofen are both very effective in lowering temperatures. It is possible to use both although this is not usually advised in young children.

### *In addition when managing a temperature:*

- Remove some layers of clothing or bedding if the patient can bear it (most people with a temperature feel cold!)
- Increase fluid intake
- Give paracetamol or ibuprofen every four hours as directed on the pack



## Febrile fits

Some children have febrile fits when they have a temperature. The fit occurs as the temperature rises - your child will become unresponsive, with twitching or thrashing. Don't panic. Lie them on their side so that the tongue can fall forwards in the mouth and they do not choke, and move away any hard objects on which they could hurt themselves. Do not put your fingers in the mouth of a fitting person – they may bite you hard! A febrile fit usually lasts less than two minutes although it will seem like longer, and afterwards they may be drowsy.

Febrile fits are most common in children under five. They do not mean your child is epileptic, although some children will have them on more than one occasion.

If your child has had a febrile fit please ring the surgery or NHS Direct for advice.

## Sore throats

Sore throats are usually caused by viral infections. The throat is red, the neck glands are swollen and it's common to have a temperature. The average viral sore throat lasts three to four days and antibiotics don't make it go any more quickly.

Occasionally sore throats get infected with bacteria. This is more likely to happen in people who have large, uneven tonsils, although most adults have no tonsils at all.

Bacterial throat infections tend to last longer than three days, and cause the breath to smell bad. You may see white spots or ulcers on the back of the throat and the glands in the neck may be extremely tender.

Most sore throats are best treated with paracetamol, or with throat lozenges from the chemist such as Strepsils or Dequacaine. Occasionally bacterial sore throats need penicillin from the doctor.



## Coughs and colds

The common cold is caused by a virus. It causes a sore throat, a stuffy nose, sneezing, catarrh and a cough, which may be loose and productive. It will make you cough up phlegm – this is often clear at first but may turn yellow or green. Green phlegm most often comes from the back of the nose and throat. It goes down into the lungs and then you cough it out again. It doesn't usually mean you have a bacterial chest infection.

The best treatment for a viral cough is to inhale steam to sooth the lungs, and to take enough exercise that you are breathing in and out with the whole of your lungs and encouraging them to cough out any phlegm which starts to become trapped.

Some people do go on from a common cold to develop a chest infection, usually because mucus has become trapped in the chest. This is more likely to happen if you smoke or have asthma, which means you tend to make thicker mucus which is more difficult to cough out.

## Sinusitis

Some adults develop sinus infections when they have a common cold. This causes a recurrence of your temperature, usually with headaches, which are worse on bending forwards, and a pain around the eyes or teeth. Sinus infections may respond to steam inhalation and usually settle by themselves, but if symptoms persist for more than 48 hours then it is worth seeking medical advice by phone or at the surgery.

### **Chest infections**

If you develop a bacterial chest infection your temperature will go up again a few days into the illness. You may start to cough green sputum, or your cough may be dry, but either way you are likely to feel quite unwell. You may start to feel short of breath or even cough up blood. All of these are reasons to see the doctor who is likely to listen to your chest and who may prescribe antibiotics.

### **Earache and ear infections**

Earache is very common in young children when they have a cold. It does not always mean they have an ear infection – the ears will often hurt when the throat is sore, or when the nose is stuffy and the ears become congested. They can become quite painful and it is sensible to treat ear pain with paracetamol or ibuprofen.

If the earache continues for more than 24 hours or the ear discharges it may be sensible to see a doctor, although generally speaking antibiotics don't make much difference to the length of time for which the ear hurts.

### **Flu – influenza**

We have all heard of flu, which is a seasonal viral infection that can be quite severe. Flu makes you feel awful. You will have a high temperature, aching limbs and muscles, a headache and a dry cough. It can last up to two weeks. Flu is not dangerous to young, fit people. However elderly patients, and those with asthma or any chronic illness, are more likely to get a bacterial chest infection on top of the flu (see chest infections, above). For this reason people over 65 years of age and those with asthma or heart disease are advised to have flu immunisation every autumn.



### **Swine Flu**

Swine flu is like normal flu, although it seems to affect younger people more often than those over 55. If you have swine flu you will have flu like symptoms including sore throat, runny nose, temperature and cough. You will feel rotten and may need to rest/go to bed.

Swine flu has so far been a mild though unpleasant illness in the VAST majority of people.

Antiviral medication is given to those who are at greater risk of becoming more seriously ill – which means those with existing chronic health problems including diabetes and asthma, those who are pregnant, people over 65 and children under 5.

A vaccine will be available this winter, although initial priority will be to give it to those at higher risk from the disease.

If you think you have swine flu: phone the flu service on: 0800 1 513 100

Or log on at [www.pandemicflu.direct.gov.uk/](http://www.pandemicflu.direct.gov.uk/)

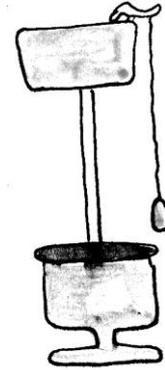


## Sickness and diarrhoea

Vomiting can be due to a viral infection, and is sometimes followed by diarrhoea as the illness moves 'down' the digestive system. However vomiting can be a non specific sign, which means some people feel – and are – sick just because they have a temperature or headache.

### *Treatment of vomiting:*

- Stop eating solids until vomiting has settled.
- Drink small amounts of water or squash very frequently. If you vomit, wait twenty minutes then start tiny sips again. You will absorb some of it.
- You will feel better if you drink fluids with some calories in, like squash, rather than plain water.
- Once the sickness has settled keep the diet very light for the first 24 hours – dry biscuits, bread, toast etc.



### *Treatment of diarrhoea*

- Diarrhoea usually gets better without treatment.
- Replace the fluids that the patient is losing with extra drinks.
- Drink squash rather than water if you can. Dioralyte and other similar oral rehydration fluids are useful at replacing lost fluid and salts. Flat coke or lemonade can be useful if you don't have Dioralyte.
- Avoid drinks containing milk, as milk is not absorbed by the body for about 48 hours after a diarrhoea attack, and is likely to give you gripey stomach pains.
- If a small child only wants to drink milk give it to them – it's better to have some fluid and a gripey tummy than to have no fluid at all and become dehydrated.
- Most diarrhoea in the UK is caused by viruses and will settle within 2-3 days.

**Small children can get dehydrated very quickly, especially if they're also being sick. Contact us or NHS Direct if worried – particularly if your child is under a year old.**

### **Rashes**

Rashes are very common in children. Most rashes are viral and most rashes are harmless to patients and others. Most harmless rashes are red and bumpy, and appear 48 hours after your child has developed a temperature.

**If your child develops a purple rash which doesn't disappear when you press on it with a glass, speak to or see a doctor as soon as possible, especially if your child is also unwell.**

Most of the time your doctor can't tell you which infection causes a rash – there are so many possibilities. However some childhood illnesses – such as chickenpox, mumps and measles - are quite recognisable. If you suspect your child has one of these illnesses, it may be useful to ask your doctor to confirm.

## Illnesses that aren't viruses

### Indigestion

Indigestion can cause a sharp, distressing pain, usually just below the breastbone although it can come up behind the breastbone or seem to pierce through to the back.

It can be confused with heart pain, which can be felt in the same area (although heart pain is not usually sharp or burning in nature).

Indigestion may be provoked by smoking, alcohol, tea, coffee, hunger, stress and some medications, particularly aspirin.

Indigestion may settle with a simple remedy such as a glass of milk or a dose of milk of magnesia or Gaviscon (both available from the chemist), but if the problem is persistent you should see your doctor, particularly if you have never had it before.



### Cystitis

Cystitis (urine or bladder infection) is very common in women. It causes stinging or burning on passing water, and the urge to pass water when there's nothing to pass. You may feel sick, shivery or nauseated, and you may see blood in the urine.

Drink as much fluid as you can to try to wash the infection from your bladder and contact the surgery or out of hours service. Cystitis often needs a short course of antibiotics and doctors usually prescribe for you on hearing the story, although it is useful to bring a urine sample to the surgery for testing.



### Nosebleed

Most nosebleeds are from fragile blood vessels low down in the nose, the soft part below the bone. Just like any other bleeding, if you press on this it will stop.

If you have a nosebleed sit in a chair, leaning forward with your mouth open, and squeeze the SOFT (lower, below the bone) part of your nose firmly between finger and thumb.... and KEEP SQUEEZING for 10 minutes. Sucking an ice cube may also slow the bleeding, but if it doesn't stop after ten minutes telephone your surgery or NHS Direct for advice. Occasionally nosebleeds cannot be stopped by squeezing, and need to be seen in casualty.

### Dry skin and eczema

Eczema is very common at all ages. It can be due to an allergic reaction to something, or it can just appear. It causes dry skin which may become bumpy, scaly, red and itchy. If generous application of moisturising cream doesn't work, make an appointment with your doctor or practice nurse to discuss what else to do.

## **Impetigo**

Impetigo is a skin infection common in children, and fairly contagious. It causes a slightly golden crusty scab and itchy weeping skin. If you have impetigo contact your surgery to ask about treatment, and avoid sharing flannels or towels till the condition has settled.

## **Conjunctivitis**

This is an infection on the surface of the eye, usually caused by bacteria. It causes itching and a gritty feeling, but without pain or loss of vision. It usually responds to simple cleaning of the eye with boiled water – but if this doesn't work you can buy antibiotic drops from the chemist: if you normally wear contact lenses you should remove them during an episode of conjunctivitis as the drops will discolour them.

## **Warts**

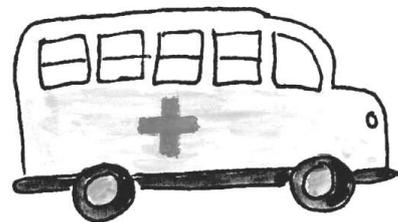
Warts are caused by wart viruses which get into the skin and can take several years to go away again. They are very mildly infectious on contact but are essentially harmless and can usually be treated with wart creams and gels from the chemist.

Occasionally, if this doesn't work, your doctor or practice nurse will freeze them off for you.

# **Managing minor injuries**

## **Bumps and bruises**

Children fall over a lot and may seem quite upset when they do fall. Forming a bruise where you have knocked yourself is usually quite normal and the average child under ten has about twelve bruises on their legs at any one time! However if you think your child has started to bruise unusually, or if your child is bruised and cannot walk or walks with a limp, it may be wise to seek medical advice from the surgery or from NHS Direct.



## **Cuts and grazes**

You can usually stop a cut from bleeding by pressing on it for two to three minutes. Blood can be frightening, especially to children, and it's important to be calm and reassuring, even if you don't feel it.

If the cut is deep, or the edges will not come together, or if the cut won't stop bleeding after 5 minutes of firm pressure, then consult your doctor or practice nurse.

Grazes often contain dirt or gravel and need to be cleaned gently with a weak antiseptic solution.

If your tetanus injections are not up to date you may need a booster.

## Sprains and strains

Sprains are common injuries, usually involving damage to muscles, tendons or ligaments. The injured part will usually swell up and look bruised, and it can be difficult to decide if you have broken a bone. Broken bones swell up and bruise quite a lot – but so do some sprains.

First apply an ice compress for 15 to 30 minutes to reduce any swelling. Apply a crepe bandage firmly and give the sprain plenty of rest in an elevated position until all the discomfort and swelling has gone. If the limb is not rested, further pain and swelling will occur and recovery will take longer. A bad sprain can take weeks or months to recover.

## Head injuries

If you have hit your head you should see a doctor or go to A+E the same day if

- you were knocked out
- you start vomiting more than once within a few hours of the injury
- you develop double vision
- you are confused or unconscious

If severe, head injury can cause a skull fracture (which usually needs quite a forceful injury as the skull is a very strong bone) or concussion (when the brain is bruised, causing headache, sickness and double vision). If unsure it is important to get advice.

## Burns and scalds

Any burn or scald needs immediate action. For minor burns or scalds, remove any jewellery or clothing that may become a problem if swelling occurs. Cool the affected area with cold water for at least 10 minutes then cover with a light non-fluffy dressing. Do not burst blisters and do not put on cream or ointments. If the burn is larger than the size of your hand, if the burn is on the face or if the skin is broken, cool the area and seek urgent medical attention.

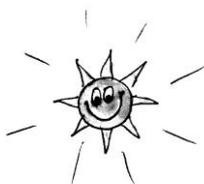


## Headlice

Headlice, contrary to popular belief, prefer clean hair and are, therefore, not a sign of poor personal hygiene. They do not survive for long once removed from the root of the hair.

Medicated head lice lotion can be obtained from your pharmacist without prescription.

If headlice won't seem to go it is usually either because you haven't combed out all the eggs or because your child has been reinfested. Both are very common.

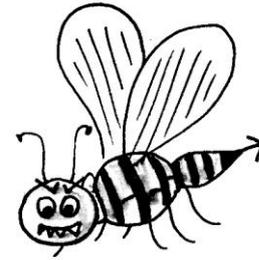


## Sunburn

Care should be taken at all times to avoid over-exposure to the sun, particularly with children. Treat sunburn by applying cold water to remove the heat. Calamine lotion (dabbed not rubbed) will relieve the irritation, as will proprietary after-sun creams, whilst paracetamol will also help the soreness.

## **Insect bites and stings**

First, remove bee stings with tweezers by gripping the base of the sting nearest the skin to avoid squeezing the poison sac and then apply a cold compress. If stung in the mouth, suck on an ice cube or sip cold water and seek immediate medical attention. Always seek medical attention if someone has an allergy to bites and stings, the sting cannot be removed, the area around the sting becomes inflamed or someone experiences shortness of breath or fever straight after a sting.



## **Insomnia**

There are many reasons for poor sleep – pain and discomfort, a stuffy room, needing to use the lavatory, snoring partner. Sometimes poor sleep is a sign of anxiety or depression (see below). However sometimes bad sleep is just a bad habit you have got into.

Difficulty sleeping will be made worse by drinking caffeine or smoking later than about 4pm, by shift work with changes of pattern and by failing to unwind and relax before you go to bed.

Doctors prefer to avoid treating poor sleep with sleeping tablets, which are very addictive. Instead it is worth trying to re-establish a good sleeping pattern: get ready for bed an hour before you plan to go and then have an ‘unwinding hour’ when you sit and read quietly or watch TV – without cleaning the kitchen, walking the dog or exercising. Then go to bed with a small warm drink and turn out the light....

## **Stress and depression**

Stress is a normal, natural response to difficult circumstances. Everybody feels stress, and it’s part of what makes us cope with life’s challenges. Stress makes your heart beat faster, it makes you feel more anxious and sleep less. It may make you eat more or eat less, and it feels very unpleasant. Particularly stressful situations include house moves, bereavements, relationship difficulties, holidays and weddings. They are all times when we ask a lot of ourselves and we can all feel the strain. Stress is normal, and generally, if the cause of the stress is removed, the feelings will settled down fairly quickly.

Depression is an illness. It can be caused by stress or it can arrive out of the blue without obvious reason. Depression causes a low mood, but can also affect sleep, appetite, sex drive, relationships, friendships and the ability to enjoy yourself. If you feel you may be depressed, or if those around you suggest that you seem depressed, please consider booking an appointment with your doctor to talk it through. There are many possible solutions, not all of which involve taking tablets, and you owe it to yourself to seek help.

## The home medicine chest – what should I keep at home?

It makes sense to keep a range of medicines locked away (out of the reach of children) for the management of minor illnesses and minor injuries. Here is a suggested list of the kind of things you should keep at home:

- A selection of plasters in assorted sizes
- A triangular bandage
- Sterile dressings in assorted sizes
- Tweezers for removing splinters
- Thermometer for fevers
- Calamine lotion for dabbing onto insect bites, stings and sunburn
- Antiseptic cream to treat sores, spots and grazes
- Vapour rub for steam inhalation or to rub on the chest and nose of a child with a stuffy nose or dry cough
- Paracetamol syrups to relieve pain or fever in young children
- Soluble aspirin/paracetamol/ibuprofen tablets which are good for headaches, colds, sore throats and painful bruises
- Strepisils, Dequacaine or other throat lozenges
- 7.5cm wide crepe bandage to keep dressings in place or support sprains
- Indigestion remedy e.g. milk of magnesia or Gaviscon
- Mild laxative e.g. Senokot
- Oral rehydration solution e.g. Dioralyte





## **Useful Telephone Numbers**

**Christmas Maltings Surgery:**  
01440 702010



### **Out of hours:**

NHS Direct 0845 4647  
Suffolk Doctors on Call 01473 299622  
**Emergency Ambulance 999**

### **Hospitals**

Addenbrookes (Cambridge) 01223 245151  
West Suffolk (Bury St Edmunds) 01284 713000  
Rosie Maternity 01223 245151  
St Nicholas Hospice, Bury St Edmunds 01284 766133  
Arthur Rank Hospice, Cambridge 01223 723110

### **Medical**

Alcoholics Anonymous 08457 697 555  
District Nurses 01440 710036  
Health Visitors 01440 766000  
Midwives 01440 713219  
Mental Health Services (24 hrs) 01440 766060  
DAS (drug and alcohol help) 01284 775275  
Focus (drug and alcohol counselling) 01284 701702  
Relate 01284 767306

### **Help and Advice**

Childline 0800 111  
Careline 0208 514 1177  
Domestic Violence helpline 0808 2000 247  
NSPCC 0800 800 5000  
Samaritans 08457 909090  
Rape Crisis Helpline 01223 245888

### **Family Planning**

Haverhill Family Planning Clinic 01440 766000  
Young People's Clinic 01440 766000

### **Other Services**

Age Concern 0800 009966  
Citizen's Advice Bureau 01440 704012  
Social Services 08456 023023  
Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) 0800 389 6819