

Managing Your Medicines and Appliances during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to many changes in how healthcare is delivered and as a result managing your medicines has changed too. GP practices and community pharmacies are under increasing pressure as they work hard to keep patients and their staff safe whilst maintaining medicines supplies to all those who need them. As such, all patients need to make changes to how they normally manage their medicines and the information below will help.

This document will provide you with information on the following topics:

- **Ordering your medicines and appliances**
- **Your prescriptions**
- **Local community pharmacies**
- **Self-care**
 - **Medicine updates - Ibuprofen & ACE inhibitors**
- **Blood tests for monitoring your treatment**

Ordering Your Medicines and Appliances

- **Only order what you need and avoid stockpiling.**

Check what you have at home before you place your order and avoid stockpiling as this creates medicines shortages. Medicines waste is on the rise and during these challenging times, it is even more important to only order what you need.
- **Only request one month's supply at a time from your pharmacy.**

This will help to ensure there is enough medicines for everyone who needs them. Your GP will prescribe the same quantity as before but your community pharmacist needs to manage their stock and may not be able to give you more than a month at a time. Your community pharmacist will try and ensure that patients have at least one month's supply of medication.
- **Your GP may need to prescribe alternative medicines if your usual medicines are out of stock.**

There might be manufacturing issues with some medicines and obtaining them could be difficult or take time. Your local pharmacy will endeavour to source the medicines for you, but you may also have to try different pharmacies (as they use different suppliers). If the item is out of stock long-term, the GP may have to prescribe an alternative.

- **Order online via your GP practice website or via an App (e.g. NHS App), whenever possible.**
Download one of the NHS apps to help you manage your prescriptions e.g. the app chosen by your practice. Further information can be found [here](#).
- **To avoid errors, prescription requests cannot be taken over the telephone by your GP practice.**
If you do not have access to a computer or smartphone, order your medicines by ticking what you need on the right-hand side of your prescription and post to your GP practice. Alternatively, contact your local pharmacy in the usual way to inform them which medicines you need.
- **Place your orders 10 days in advance**
This to allow for processing both at your GP practice and at your chosen local pharmacy. Your GP practice normally needs 48-72 hours to process your prescription, but your pharmacy may need 5 to 7 days to dispense it.
- **If you are taking medicines normally prescribed by a hospital specialist, the hospital will arrange for you to receive supplies by post or courier.**
Patients that would usually get their specialist medicines or appliances from hospital will continue to do so. The GP will usually not be able to prescribe specialist medicines.
- **Homecare company or appliance contractor prescriptions remain the same.**
If you normally receive supplies from a homecare company or an appliance contractor e.g. catheters or nutritional products, you can still order your prescriptions from your GP practice by Electronic Prescriptions (EPS). Again, only order what you need, to avoid stockpiling.
- **Please note: Do not request deliveries when using both the myGP and Doctorlink apps, a fault on it means your prescriptions will be sent to an online service.**

Your Prescriptions

- **Ask your community pharmacy or surgery to change your prescriptions to electronic prescriptions (EPS).**
EPS means you do not have to visit the GP surgery to pick up your prescription as it is transmitted electronically to your nominated community pharmacy. Please note there may be a very short delay in the prescriptions arriving at the pharmacy after you have had a consultation with your GP.. Further information can be found [here](#)

- **Find out if you are suitable to receive your prescriptions via electronic repeat dispensing (eRD).**

This system allows your GP practice to issue up to a year's supply of medicines in instalments e.g. 13 x 28-day prescriptions at once. You will be able to collect these directly from your nominated community pharmacy at regular intervals and will only need to request medication from your GP once these instalments are near the end. This system is only suitable for patients on stable medication. Again, only request which medicines you need each month, to avoid stockpiling. For more information click [here](#).

Local Community Pharmacies

- **Community pharmacies are still available for advice on health conditions.**
During this period, pharmacies are extremely busy. It may take you a while to get through on the telephone and due to social distancing, you may have to queue to enter the pharmacy. Further information is available on NHS website <https://www.nhs.uk/>
- **Please check what times your local pharmacy is open during this period.**
To allow staff breaks, pharmacies are allowed to reduce their opening hours to a minimum of 10am to 12noon and 2pm to 4pm. However, most are still open outside of these times. For pharmacy opening hours please see <http://www.myhealth.london.nhs.uk> . Remember to allow longer than usual to collect your medicines or arrange to have them delivered.
- **If you are self-isolating or shielding, please ask a friend, relative or neighbour to collect your medicines from the pharmacy for you.**
Shielding patients would have received a letter to stay at home for 12 weeks due to being highly vulnerable. Please ask a friend, carer or relative to pick up your medications for you. It is advisable to give them a written note authorising them to pick up your medicines and to take a form of picture identification with them. If you have no one to pick up your medication, please let your pharmacist know and they will ensure your medicines are delivered.
- **Normal deliveries from your community pharmacy may take a bit longer.**
Please bear with pharmacy staff at this busy time.
- **Prescription Charges will be collected by card over the telephone before your delivery is made if you normally pay for your prescriptions.** If you are unable to pay this way, please discuss with your community pharmacy.

Self-Care

It is useful to have a well-stocked medicines cabinet with medicines and first aid products that you may need for treating minor conditions e.g. hayfever. Staff at your local pharmacy are available to advise you on suitable products that can be purchased from the pharmacy to keep at home. Several medicines are also available from local supermarkets and other retail outlets. Please avoid stockpiling large quantities of medicines. For further information and advice click [here](#)

Taking ibuprofen for COVID-19 symptoms

There has been a lot of media coverage regarding ibuprofen and its effect when taken to treat symptoms of COVID-19. There is currently no strong evidence that ibuprofen can make COVID-19 worse.

You can take paracetamol or ibuprofen when self-medicating for symptoms of COVID-19, such as fever and headache, and check [NHS advice](#) if you have any questions or if symptoms get worse.

If you are already taking ibuprofen or another non-steroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAID) on the advice of a doctor, do not stop taking it without checking first. For further information click [here](#).

Taking ACE inhibitors* with COVID-19 symptoms

There has been a lot of media coverage regarding a link between taking ACE inhibitors* e.g. ramipril, lisinopril, enalapril and the risk of contracting COVID-19. Patients are prescribed ACE inhibitors for a number of reasons and for some people, particularly those with heart failure, stopping medication suddenly can lead to them becoming unwell. This can lead to breathlessness and may create uncertainty about whether symptoms are due to infection (such as COVID-19), or due to underlying health problems.

Patients taking ACE inhibitors are advised to continue to take them. If you become unwell and need to seek medical help, your doctor may advise stopping some medication depending on your clinical condition. For further information click [here](#).

Blood tests for monitoring your treatment

Your GP or hospital specialist will continue to arrange for you to have regular blood tests to monitor how well your medicines are working or how your kidney, liver, thyroid or blood is functioning. You may need to continue attending blood test centres or if you are self-isolating or shielding, you may have your blood test done at home but at less frequent intervals. Please check with your hospital specialist for advice on blood tests for medicines prescribed by the hospital or your GP for advice on blood tests for medicines prescribed by your practice.

In some cases, if you are suitable, your doctor may change you to different medication that requires less frequent monitoring. Your doctor will let you know if it applies to you.

As always, your GP practice and local community pharmacies are available to answer your individual health and medicines queries. Check their websites before you call them as many have updated their websites with COVID-19 related information. Remember, telephone lines may be busy during these unprecedented times.

If you need medical help fast, but it's not a life-threatening situation, call NHS 111 or visit 111.nhs.uk . In an emergency, call 999 or go to A&E.

For more information and COVID-19 specific advice, the following websites are helpful:

NHS websites

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-COVID-19/>

Crohns and Colitis

<https://www.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk/news/coronavirus-COVID-19-advice>

Heart conditions

<https://www.bhf.org.uk/informationsupport/heart-matters-magazine/news/coronavirus-and-your-health>

<https://renal.org/COVID-19/ra-resources-renal-professionals/renal-association-uk-position-statement-patients-novel-corona-virus-infection-use-blood-pressure-medications/>

Asthma

<https://www.asthma.org.uk/coronavirus/>

<https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/coronavirus>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/asthma/>

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/chronic-obstructive-pulmonary-disease-copd/>

Cystic Fibrosis

<https://www.cysticfibrosis.org.uk/life-with-cystic-fibrosis/coronavirus>

Palliative and End of life care

<https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/support/coronavirus>

<https://www.macmillan.org.uk/coronavirus/end-of-life-care-and-coronavirus>

Mental Health and Wellbeing

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/coronavirus-COVID-19-anxiety-tips>

<https://mentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus>

<https://www.headspace.com/>

HIV

<https://www.bhiva.org/coronavirus-and-HIV-responses-to-common-questions-from-BHIVA>

Diabetes

https://www.diabetes.org.uk/about_us/news/coronavirus

Medicines during Ramadan

<https://www.diabetes.org.uk/guide-to-diabetes/managing-your-diabetes/ramadan>

Cancer

<https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/cancer-in-general/coronavirus-and-cancer>

<https://www.macmillan.org.uk/coronavirus/cancer-and-coronavirus>

Kidney Care

<https://www.kidneycareuk.org/news-and-campaigns/coronavirus-advice/>

Arthritis

<https://www.versusarthritis.org/news/2020/april/coronavirus-COVID-19-what-is-it-and-where-to-go-for-information/>