

Children's medicines

Not all medicines are suitable for young children

Most illnesses get better by themselves and make your child stronger and able to resist similar illnesses in the future.

The Minor Ailments Scheme may be useful if your child has a minor illness, skin condition or injury e.g. headlice. The scheme can be accessed at many pharmacies. See if your local pharmacy offers the scheme. Paracetamol and ibuprofen are often used to relieve the discomfort caused by a high temperature (make sure you've got the correct dosage for the age of your child). Some children, for example those with asthma or chickenpox, may not be able to take ibuprofen, so check with your pharmacist, GP or health visitor.

Don't give paracetamol to a baby under six weeks unless prescribed by a doctor. Don't give aspirin to children under 16, and if you're breastfeeding, ask your health visitor, midwife or GP for advice before taking aspirin yourself.

Children don't often need antibiotics. Most childhood infections are caused by viruses. Antibiotics are medicines which kill bacteria. They work only against bacteria, not the viruses that cause the majority of sore throats, colds, sinus infections and bronchitis. For bacterial infections however, antibiotics work quickly and symptoms usually improve within 24-48 hours. Often children can feel completely better shortly after beginning the antibiotic course. To beat the bacterial infection, it is important that your child finishes the entire course as prescribed, even if your child seems better.

Antibiotics for children

If you're offered a prescription for an antibiotic, talk to your GP about why it is needed and how it will help. Ask about any possible side effects.

Repeated use and misuse of antibiotics are some of the main causes of the increase in resistant bacteria. Antibiotics are now no longer routinely used to treat chest infections, ear infections in children and sore throats.

If your child is prescribed antibiotics always finish the whole course to make sure all the bacteria are killed off. Your child may seem better after two or three days, but if the course is five days, they must carry on taking the medicine. The illness is more likely to return if your child does not finish all the antibiotics and they may not work next time if they get a similar illness.

1

My child has a bad cold and I want to get some antibiotics from my GP.

2

Do not expect your GP to automatically give you antibiotics (or any other medicine).

3

Antibiotics aren't always the answer when your child is unwell.