

MEDIA RELEASE

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The common health conditions that can be treated at home this Christmas

December is a busy time of year, but as many of us finally stop and relax in between Christmas and the New Year, the cold weather, stress, plentiful socialising and overindulgence can all lead to some of us suffering from the winter lurgy over the festive period.

Many common self-treatable conditions, such as cold and flu, are often short-lived and can normally be treated at home with rest and an over-the-counter (OTC) medicine to help treat and ease the symptoms. If you need advice on what to do or what to take, your local pharmacist will be able to help.

John Smith, Chief Executive of PAGB (Proprietary Association of Great Britain) comments, “In the days before and after Christmas and New Year, A&E departments tend to experience an increase in the number of people visiting due to the fact that many GP surgeries are shut during this time. Therefore, it’s important that people manage self-treatable conditions at home when appropriate, particularly those who are young and otherwise healthy, so that NHS services can be available for emergencies and those that are seriously ill.

“Many local pharmacies will be open throughout the Christmas break, so we would advise people to visit a pharmacist for advice in the first instance. Pharmacists are highly trained healthcare professionals who will be able to recommend the appropriate course of treatment. If your local pharmacy isn’t open, then the NHS 111 non-emergency number can help to assess your symptoms and will direct you to medical care if necessary.”

Steve Riley, community and clinical pharmacist shares his advice on how to treat common self-treatable conditions that may be experienced during the Christmas break:

- **Bloating¹** – we are usually all guilty of overindulging at Christmas, enjoying the rich and sugary foods that only appear once a year, such as mince pies and mulled wine. However, overindulgence of these types of foods can cause trapped wind and bloating, which may feel uncomfortable. If you do suffer from bloating, then an OTC antacid can help to relieve symptoms.
- **Food poisoning²** – the risk of food poisoning can rise at this time of year due to poor food hygiene and a fridge full of both cooked and uncooked food. For many, it can also be the first time cooking a large turkey, and undercooked meat can also cause problems. Food poisoning can usually be treated at home without seeking medical advice and by using OTC medicines. Anti-diarrhoeal tablets can help to stop the symptoms of diarrhoea and oral rehydration solutions are a good way to replace glucose, essential salts and minerals and help avoid dehydration, which is particularly dangerous for the young and elderly.

- **Headaches and migraines³** – headaches and migraines may commonly be attributed to stress, but they can also be triggered by strong scented candles and bright Christmas lights. Many people find lying in a dark room can help them to feel better and short-term use of OTC pain relief medicines like paracetamol or ibuprofen can help to relieve symptoms if taken at the first sign.
- **Coughs & colds⁴** – many people experience coughs and colds at some point during the winter, however spending longer periods of time in close proximity to friends and family that may be suffering, can mean coughs and colds can spread in the build up to the New Year. Your pharmacist will be able to recommend the appropriate OTC products to help manage your symptoms. Decongestants work to reduce swelling in the nose and ease your breathing, while cough syrups will soothe the throat and reduce the urge to cough. Combination products can help if you are suffering from a number of symptoms. Pharmacists will also be able to advise on the best options for children so that you can treat the whole family.
- **Minor burns⁵** – with candles glowing everywhere and ovens being used to the maximum, the risk of burns can be much greater around the festive period. Whilst you should take safety precautions to avoid burning yourself, if you are unfortunate to suffer a minor burn, then there are ways to minimise the pain. To treat minor burns and scalds, you should first cool the affected area under cold or lukewarm water for 20 minutes and remove clothing and jewellery around the burn. You can then cover the burn with cling film which will keep the moisture in and any infections away from the burn. To treat the pain associated with the burn you can also take painkillers, such as paracetamol or ibuprofen, which will ease the pain and help to reduce the swelling.
- **Indigestion⁶** – not only eating more, but eating rich foods such as Christmas pudding and drinking alcohol can cause indigestion and heartburn. Some people will suffer more than others, but symptoms should be manageable at home by taking the appropriate medication. An antacid will help to control the level of acid in your stomach and can provide fast relief for mild to moderate symptoms leaving you to enjoy the leftovers - in moderation of course! People who regularly suffer from indigestion or heartburn may benefit from a proton pump inhibitor.

- ENDS -

Notes to editors:

PAGB (Proprietary Association of Great Britain) is the UK trade association representing manufacturers of branded over-the-counter medicines, self care medical devices and food supplements.

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¹ <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/digestive-health/Pages/beat-the-bloat.aspx>

² <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Food-poisoning/Pages/Treatment.aspx>

³ <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Migraine/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

⁴ <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/coldsandflu/Pages/Coldcomfort.aspx>

⁵ <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Burns-and-scalds/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

⁶ <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Indigestion/Pages/Introduction.aspx#Treatment>