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317



Medicines in Scotland: What's the right treatment for you?

Information for patients and the public



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This factsheet explains how your doctor (or other healthcare professional) decides what is the right treatment for you, whether you need a medicine and, if so, which medicine to prescribe.

Medicines are usually prescribed by a doctor. However, other healthcare professionals can also prescribe medicines (for example some nurses, pharmacists, dentists and physiotherapists). In this factsheet, "healthcare professional" is used to describe the person prescribing the medicine.

I am unhappy about my care. How do I make a suggestion or give feedback?

You should speak to the healthcare professional about your concerns as soon as possible. Not everyone will find this easy so you can ask a friend or family member to do this for you or ask another healthcare professional for a second opinion.

You can also give feedback on the service or care you received.

Each GP practice, dental surgery, hospital, pharmacy and other places where you get NHS care has someone responsible for looking into comments and suggestions. They can give you a leaflet with information on how to make a suggestion or give feedback. You can also find information on your health board's website about giving feedback.



I have an appointment with a healthcare professional to discuss a problem. How will they decide if a medicine is needed for me?

The healthcare professional will listen to what you say about your problem, and may examine you or do some tests, before deciding what treatment, if any, is needed. In some cases, treatment with a medicine may not be needed and the healthcare professional may:

- > reassure you that there is nothing to worry about
- > advise you on lifestyle choices (for example healthy diet, less alcohol and more exercise)
- > suggest other types of treatment (for example physiotherapy), or
- > advise you to keep a check on your symptoms and make another appointment if they do not get better.

If I need a medicine, how does the healthcare professional decide which medicine to prescribe?

If a medicine is needed, the healthcare professional will speak to you about your options. You will have your own views about medicines and how taking a medicine fits in with your daily life. You may be unsure about the risks and benefits of taking a medicine. The healthcare professional will listen to what is important for you.

The healthcare professional will firstly consider the type of medicine that is needed (for example medicine for high blood pressure or pain relief). Sometimes, more than one medicine can treat a medical condition. The healthcare professional will choose the most appropriate medicine from the different groups of medicines available to treat your medical condition. The healthcare professional will also decide on the best dose of the medicine for you.



I have medicines I no longer need. What should I do with them?

You can take medicines you no longer need to a pharmacy. They will destroy them safely for you.

You should not flush medicines down the toilet or put them in a household bin. All medicines should be kept out of the reach of children.



I have heard patients can report side effects to medicines. Where can I get more information on how to do this?

You should tell a healthcare professional if you think you are experiencing side effects from your medicine.

Side effects can be reported through the Yellow Card Scheme which is run by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). The Yellow Card Scheme helps the MHRA monitor the safety of medicines.

You can find more information on reporting side effects and completing a Yellow Card form on the Yellow Card Centre Scotland website (www.yccscotland.scot.nhs.uk/patients).

You can also

- > use the Yellow Card app – download from the Apple App Store® or Google Play®
- > call the Yellow Card hotline on 0808 100 3352 (weekdays 10am to 2pm), or
- > ask your pharmacist for a Yellow Card form, which you can complete and return to the FREEPOST address included on the form.

To help decide which medicine and dose will be best for you, the healthcare professional will consider your opinions, preferences and many other things, for example:

- > any findings from your clinical examination
- > your age and family history
- > other medical conditions that you already have (including how well your kidneys and liver are working)
- > whether you are pregnant or breast feeding
- > any other medicines you are taking (including herbal medicines and medicines you buy yourself) and how these might react with a new medicine
- > the likely benefits of a medicine
- > whether it is safe for you to take the medicine (including the possible side effects and risks of a medicine), and
- > any treatment guidelines for your medical condition.

The healthcare professional will usually prescribe a medicine by its generic (chemical) name instead of by its brand name (for example ibuprofen rather than Nurofen®).

The healthcare professional will also usually choose a medicine that is included in your health board's local 'formulary'.

What is a formulary?

A formulary is a list of medicines which are available for routine use in a health board. It offers a choice of medicines for healthcare professionals to prescribe for common medical conditions.

The list of medicines is usually accompanied by other information (for example treatment guidelines for medical conditions) to help healthcare professionals make decisions when treating an individual patient.

Clinical experts in each health board consider whether to add new medicines to their formulary. They use advice published by the Scottish Medicines Consortium (SMC) (www.scottishmedicines.org.uk). When SMC considers a new medicine for the NHS in Scotland, it looks at:

- > how well the medicine works
- > which patients might benefit from it
- > whether it is as good or better than medicines the NHS already uses to treat the medical condition, and
- > whether it is good value for money.

Sometimes established medicines are a better choice than new medicines. If clinical experts in your health board decide not to make a medicine available for use, other medicines are usually available on the formulary to treat the specific medical condition.

Health boards publish their formulary on their website. You can also find this information in the medicines information section of NHS inform (www.nhsinform.co.uk).

I think I'm experiencing side effects from my medicine. What should I do?

If you experience any side effects and are worried about them, you should tell a healthcare professional. They will be able to advise you what to do.

The leaflet which comes with your medicine will give you information on possible side effects of the medicine. All medicines can cause side effects. Some side effects are very rare but some can be more common.



I don't think my medicine is working. What should I do?

If you do not think your medicine is working properly, you should speak to a healthcare professional.

The healthcare professional will talk to you about your medicine. They will check that it is working for you and may suggest some changes to your medicine or how you take it. You should follow the instructions you have been given on how to take your medicine so you get the most benefit from it.

Some medicines do not work immediately. For example, it may take a few days before you start to feel better if you have been given an antibiotic or it may be a few weeks before you feel better with some medicines used to treat depression.

Can I be prescribed a medicine that's not on my health board's formulary?

If a medicine is not included on your health board's formulary and there are no suitable alternatives on the formulary, a healthcare professional can request to prescribe another medicine if they think you will benefit from using it.

All health boards have procedures in place to consider requests when a healthcare professional feels another medicine would be right for a particular patient.





I have been given a medicine and I'm not sure how to take it. How can I find out how to take the medicine properly?

If you have questions about your medicine you can ask a healthcare professional at any time. The healthcare professional will advise you how to use the medicine safely. They will talk to you about:

- > what the medicine is called
- > what it is used for
- > how you should take it
- > possible side effects, and
- > whether you can stop any of the other medicines you are taking.

You should also get a leaflet with your medicine. The leaflet will give you more information about the medicine. You can ask a healthcare professional to explain anything about your medicine you are unsure about.

A credit card sized *Not Sure? Just Ask!* card is available with some useful questions for you to ask about your medicines. A healthcare professional may be able to get the card for you. It is also available from www.scottishpatientsafetyprogramme.scot.nhs.uk/programmes/medicines/Not-sure-just-ask