Illness and symptoms   
table of contents:

1. Chest pain

2. Common cold

3. Constipation

4. Cough

5. Dehydration

6. Depression

7. Diarrhea

8. Dizziness (lightheadedness)

9. Flu

10. Food poisoning

11. Gout

12. Head lice and nits

13. Headaches

14. High cholesterol

15. Hyperhidrosis

16. Indigestion

17. Insomnia

18. Iron deficiency anaemia

19. Itching

20. Leg cramps

21. Lupus

22. Malnutrition

23. Migraine

24. Obesity

25. Panic disorder

26. Stomach ulcer

27. Vertigo

28. Varicose veins

29. Tuberculosis (TB)

30. Toothache

**Vital information:**   
**1. Chest pain**  
**About Chest pain**  
Chest pain can be caused by anything from muscle pain to a heart attack and should never be ignored.  
  
**Common causes of chest pain**  
Most chest pain is not heart-related and isn't a sign of a life-threatening problem. Some common causes of chest pain are outlined below.

This information should give you an idea of whether these conditions may be causing your chest pain, but you should always seek medical advice to make sure you get a proper diagnosis.  
 **i. Gastro-esophageal reflux disease (GORD)**

Gastro-esophageal reflux disease is a common condition where acid from the stomach comes up into the esophagus (gullet).

Common symptoms of GORD include:

burning chest pain (heartburn)

an unpleasant taste in the mouth caused by stomach acid coming back up into your mouth

These symptoms usually occur soon after you've eaten and get worse if you bend over or lie down.

GORD can often be treated by making lifestyle changes and, if necessary, using medication. Read more about treating GORD.  
ii. Bone or muscle problems  
If your chest is painful and tender to touch, it may be caused by a strained muscle in your chest wall. This can be surprisingly painful, but with rest the pain should ease and the muscle will heal in time.

If you have pain, swelling and tenderness around your ribs, and the pain is made worse by lying down, breathing deeply, coughing or sneezing, you may have a condition called costochondritis.

This is caused by inflammation in the joints between the cartilage that joins the ribs to the breastbone (sternum). The symptoms often improve after a few weeks and may be relieved by painkillers.  
  
**iii. Anxiety and panic attacks**  
Some episodes of chest pain occur as part of an anxiety or panic attack.

In addition to chest pain and overwhelming feelings of anxiety, these attacks can cause symptoms such as heart palpitations, sweating, breathlessness and dizziness.

Most panic attacks last for 5 to 20 minutes. In the long-term, you may benefit from psychological therapy and medication, or both.  
 **iv. Lung conditions**  
Mild cases of pneumonia can usually be treated with antibiotics, rest and fluids. For people with other health conditions, the condition can be severe and they may need to be treated in hospital.

Treatment for pleurisy will depend on the underlying cause. Pleurisy caused by a viral infection will often resolve without needing treatment, whereas pleurisy caused by a bacterial infection will usually need to be treated with antibiotics.

Again, people who are frail or already in poor health may need to be admitted to hospital for treatment.  
  
**Other possible causes of chest pain**

There are many other potential causes of chest pain, including:

shingles – a viral infection of a nerve and the area of skin around it, which causes a painful rash that develops into itchy blisters

mastitis – pain and swelling of the breast, which is usually caused by an infection, most commonly during breastfeeding

acute cholecystitis – inflammation of the gallbladder, which can cause a sudden sharp pain in the upper right side of your tummy that spreads towards your right shoulder

stomach ulcers – a break in the lining of the stomach, which can cause a burning or gnawing pain in your tummy

a pulmonary embolism – a blockage in the blood vessel that carries blood from the heart to the lungs, which can cause sharp, stabbing chest pain that may be worse when you breathe in, as well as breathlessness, a cough and dizziness

pericarditis – inflammation of the sac surrounding your heart, which can cause a sudden, sharp and stabbing pain in your chest, or more of a dull ache; the pain usually worsens when lying down

Some of these conditions can be very serious. Make sure you seek medical advice so you can be correctly diagnosed and treated.  
  
  
  
**2. Common cold**  
**About common cold**

A cold is a mild viral infection of the nose, throat, sinuses and upper airways. It's very common and usually clears up on its own within a week or two.  
The main symptoms of a cold

a sore throat

a blocked or runny nose

sneezing

a cough  
More severe symptoms, including a high temperature (fever), headache and aching muscles can also occur, although these tend to be associated more with flu.  
**What to do**There's no cure for a cold, but you can look after yourself at home by:

resting, drinking plenty of fluids and eating healthily

taking over-the-counter painkillers, such as paracetamol or ibuprofen, to reduce any fever or discomfort

using decongestant sprays or tablets to relieve a blocked nose

trying remedies such as gargling salt water and sucking on menthol sweets

Many painkillers and decongestants are available from pharmacies without a prescription. They're generally safe for older children and adults to take, but might not be suitable for babies, young children, pregnant women, people with certain underlying health conditions, and those taking certain other medications. Speak to a pharmacist if you're unsure.

**3. Constipation**

**About constipation**

Constipation is a common condition that affects people of all ages. It can mean that you're not passing stools regularly or you're unable to completely empty your bowel.

Constipation can also cause your stools to be hard and lumpy, as well as unusually large or small.

The severity of constipation varies from person to person. Many people only experience constipation for a short time, but for others, constipation can be a long-term (chronic) condition that causes significant pain and discomfort and affects quality of life.

**What causes constipation?**

It's often difficult to identify the exact cause of constipation. However, there are a number of things that contribute to the condition, including:

not eating enough fibre, such as fruit, vegetables and cereals

a change in your routine or lifestyle, such as a change in your eating habits

ignoring the urge to pass stools

side effects of certain medications

not drinking enough fluids

anxiety or depression

In children, poor diet, fear about using the toilet and problems toilet training can all lead to constipation.

**Preventing constipation**

Making the diet and lifestyle changes mentioned above can also help to reduce your risk of developing constipation in the first place.

Giving yourself enough time and privacy to pass stools comfortably may also help, and you should try not to ignore the urge to go to the toilet.

**4. Cough  
About coughs**A cough is a reflex action to clear your airways of mucus and irritants such as dust or smoke. It's rarely a sign of anything serious.

A "dry cough" means it's tickly and doesn't produce any phlegm (thick mucus). A "chesty cough" means phlegm is produced to help clear your airways.  
  
**What can cause a cough?**

Some of the main causes of short-term (acute) and persistent (chronic) coughs are outlined below.

**Short-term coughs**

Common causes of a short-term cough include:

an upper respiratory tract infection (URTI) that affects the throat, windpipe or sinuses – examples are a cold, flu, laryngitis, sinusitis or whooping cough

a lower respiratory tract infection (LRTI) that affects your lungs or lower airways – examples are acute bronchitis or pneumonia

an allergy, such as allergic rhinitis or hay fever

a flare-up of a long-term condition such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) or chronic bronchitis

inhaled dust or smoke

In rare cases, a short-term cough may be the first sign of a health condition that causes a persistent cough.

**Persistent coughs**

A persistent cough may be caused by:

a long-term respiratory tract infection, such as chronic bronchitis

asthma – this also usually causes other symptoms, such as wheezing, chest tightness and shortness of breath

an allergy

smoking – a smoker's cough can also be a symptom of COPD

bronchiectasis – where the airways of the lungs become abnormally widened

postnasal drip – mucus dripping down the throat from the back of the nose, caused by a condition such as rhinitis or sinusitis

gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD) – where the throat becomes irritated by leaking stomach acid

a prescribed medicine, such as an angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitor (ACE inhibitor), which is used to treat high blood pressure and cardiovascular disease

In most cases, a doctor won't worry whether a cough is dry or chesty, but will need to know if you are producing much more or darker phlegm than usual.

Rarely, a persistent cough can be a symptom of a more serious condition, such as lung cancer, heart failure, a pulmonary embolism (blood clot on the lung) or tuberculosis.

**Coughs in children**

Coughs in children often have similar causes to those mentioned above. For example, respiratory tract infections, asthma and GORD can all affect children.

Causes of coughs that are more common in children than adults include:

bronchiolitis – a mild respiratory tract infection that usually causes cold-like symptoms

croup – this causes a distinctive barking cough and a harsh sound known as stridor when the child breathes in

whooping cough – look out for symptoms such as intense, hacking bouts of coughing, vomiting, and a "whoop" sound with each sharp intake of breath after coughing

Occasionally, a persistent cough in a child can be a sign of a serious long-term condition, such as cystic fibrosis.

**What treatments are available?**

Treatment isn't always necessary for short-term coughs because it's likely to be a viral infection that will get better on its own within a few weeks. You can look after yourself at home by resting, drinking plenty of fluids, and taking painkillers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen.

**Cough medicines and remedies**

Although some people find them helpful, medicines that claim to suppress your cough or stop you bringing up phlegm are not usually recommended. This is because there's little evidence to suggest they're any better than simple home remedies, and they're not suitable for everyone.

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) recommends that over-the-counter cough and cold medicines shouldn't be given to children under the age of six. Children aged 6 to 12 should only use them on the advice of a pharmacist or doctor.

A homemade remedy containing honey and lemon is likely to be just as useful and safer to take. Honey shouldn't be given to babies under the age of one because of the risk of infant botulism.

If you smoke, quitting is also likely to help improve your cough. Read more about stopping smoking.  
  
**5. Dehydration**About dehydration

Dehydration occurs when your body loses more fluid than you take in.  
  
When the normal water content of your body is reduced, it upsets the balance of minerals (salts and sugar) in your body, which affects the way it functions.

Water makes up over two-thirds of the healthy human body. It lubricates the joints and eyes, aids digestion, flushes out waste and toxins, and keeps the skin healthy.

**Some of the early warning signs of dehydration include:**

feeling thirsty and lightheaded

a dry mouth

tiredness

having dark coloured, strong-smelling urine

passing urine less often than usual

**A baby may be dehydrated if they:**

have a sunken soft spot (fontanelle) on their head

have few or no tears when they cry

have fewer wet nappies

are drowsy

The body is affected even when you lose a small amount of fluid.

**What causes dehydration?**

Dehydration is usually caused by not drinking enough fluid to replace what we lose. The climate, the amount of physical exercise you are doing (particularly in hot weather) and your diet can contribute to dehydration.

You can also become dehydrated as a result of an illness, such as persistent vomiting and diarrhea, or sweating from a fever.

**What to do**

If you're dehydrated, drink plenty of fluids such as water, diluted squash or fruit juice. These are much more effective than large amounts of tea or coffee. Fizzy drinks may contain more sugar than you need and may be harder to take in large amounts.

If you're finding it difficult to keep water down because you're vomiting, try drinking small amounts more frequently.

Infants and small children who are dehydrated shouldn't be given large amounts of water alone as the main replacement fluid. This is because it can dilute the already low level of minerals in their body too much and lead to other problems.

Instead, they should be given diluted squash or a rehydration solution (available from pharmacies). You might find a teaspoon or syringe can be helpful for getting fluid into a young child. If left untreated, severe dehydration can be serious and cause fits (seizures), brain damage and death.  
  
**6. Depression**  
**What is depression?**  
Everyone has spells of feeling down, but depression is more than just spending a few days feeling sad or unhappy. Depression can make you feel persistently sad and down for weeks or months at a time.

While some people believe that depression is trivial or not a genuine health problem, it's actually a real condition that affects around one in 10 people over the course of their lives. It impacts people of all genders and ages – including children. Studies show that around 4% of children in the UK between the ages of five and 16 are depressed or anxious.

With the right support and treatment, most people recover fully from depression.  
**Talking treatments for depression**

**There are a number of talking therapies for depression.**

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)

CBT helps you make sense of your thoughts and behaviour and the affect they have on you. Part of it's recognising that past events may have played a part in making you who you are, but the main focus is changing how you feel, behave and think now.

You can use CBT to learn how to overcome negative thoughts – this can help you to tackle feelings of hopelessness, for example.

Most people have a course of six to eight CBT sessions that goes over 10 to 12 weeks. Sessions are one-to-one, between you and a CBT-trained counsellor. You might also be offered group CBT.

Computerised CBT (CCBT)

This type of CBT is done using a computer instead of face-to-face with the counsellor. It should be supported by a healthcare professional – your GP may prescribe it, and you might have to use the computer in the GP surgery to access it. CCBT involves a series of weekly sessions.

Interpersonal Therapy (IPT)

IPT is focused on your relationships with people around you, and problems that you might be having with them. These can include problems communicating, or dealing with a bereavement.

There's evidence that suggests IPT can be as effective for depression as CBT or medication, but more research needs to be done.

Psychodynamic psychotherapy

This is also known as psychoanalytic psychotherapy. You'll work with a therapist who encourages you to say whatever you're thinking. This helps you to find hidden patterns and meanings in your words and behaviour that could be contributing to your depression.  
  
Counselling

Counselling is a type of therapy that works really well if you have good mental wellbeing overall but need help coping with a crisis that's currently going on in your life. These can include anger, bereavement, infertility, relationship problems, job loss and serious illness.  
  
  
**7. Diarrhea  
  
About diarrhea**

Diarrhea is passing looser or more frequent stools than is normal for you.

It affects most people from time to time and is usually nothing to worry about. However, it can be distressing and unpleasant until it passes, which normally takes a few days to a week.

**What causes diarrhea?**

There are many different causes of diarrhea, but a bowel infection (gastroenteritis) is a common cause in both adults and children.

Gastroenteritis can be caused by:

a virus – such as norovirus or rotavirus

bacteria – such as campylobacter and Escherichia coli (E. coli), which are often picked up from contaminated food

a parasite – such as the parasite that causes giardiasis, which is spread in contaminated water

These infections can sometimes be caught during travel abroad, particularly to areas with poor standards of public hygiene. This is known as travellers' diarrhea.

Diarrhea can also be the result of anxiety, a food allergy, medication, or a long-term condition, such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).  
  
**What to do if you have diarrhea**

Most cases of diarrhea clear up after a few days without treatment, and you may not need to see your GP.

However, diarrhea can lead to dehydration, so you should drink plenty of fluids – small, frequent sips of water – until it passes. It's very important that babies and small children do not become dehydrated.

Your pharmacist may suggest you use an oral rehydration solution (ORS) if you or your child are particularly at risk of dehydration.

You should eat solid food as soon as you feel able to. If you're breastfeeding or bottle feeding your baby and they have diarrhea, you should try to feed them as normal.

Stay at home until at least 48 hours after the last episode of diarrhea to prevent spreading any infection to others.

Medications to reduce diarrhea, such as loperamide, are available. However, these are not usually necessary, and most types should not be given to children.

**Preventing diarrhea**

Diarrhea is often caused by an infection. You can reduce your risk by making sure you maintain high standards of hygiene.

For example, you should:

wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water after going to the toilet and before eating or preparing food

clean the toilet, including the handle and the seat, with disinfectant after each bout of diarrhea

avoid sharing towels, flannels, cutlery, or utensils with other household members

It's also important to practice good food and water hygiene while travelling abroad, such as avoiding potentially unsafe tap water and undercooked food.  
  
**8. Dizziness (lightheadedness)  
About Dizziness**Dizziness is a common symptom that’s not usually a sign of anything serious, but should be investigated by a doctor.

The term "dizziness" means different things to different people – some use it to describe feeling lightheaded or off balance, while others use it to describe a feeling that their surroundings are spinning.

Because the symptom is quite vague and can be caused by a wide range of things, it may not always be easy to identify the underlying cause of dizziness.

This page explains what you should do if you feel dizzy for no apparent reason, and outlines the most common causes.  
  
**Common causes of dizziness**

The most common causes of dizziness are outlined below.

Labyrinthitis – an inner ear infection that affects your hearing and balance, and can lead to a severe form of dizziness called vertigo.

Migraine – dizziness may come on before or after the headache, or even without the headache.

Stress or anxiety – particularly if you tend to hyperventilate (breathe abnormally quickly when resting).

Low blood sugar level (hypoglycaemia) – which is usually seen in people with diabetes.

Postural hypotension – a sudden fall in blood pressure when you suddenly sit or stand up, which goes away after lying down. This is more common in older people.

Dehydration or heat exhaustion – dehydration could be due to not drinking enough during exercise, or illness that causes vomiting, diarrhea or fever.

Vertebrobasilar insufficiency – decreased blood flow in the back of the brain, which may be caused by the blood vessels that lead to the brain from the heart being blocked (known as atherosclerosis).  
  
**Remedies for dizziness:**lying down and closing the eyes.

acupuncture.

drinking plenty of water and keeping hydrated.

reducing stress plus alcohol and tobacco intake.

getting plenty of sleep.  
 **9. Flu  
About flu**

Flu (influenza) is a common infectious viral illness spread by coughs and sneezes. It can be very unpleasant, but you'll usually begin to feel better within about a week.

You can catch flu all year round, but it's especially common in winter, which is why it's also known as seasonal flu.

Flu isn't the same as the common cold. Flu is caused by a different group of viruses and the symptoms tend to start more suddenly, be more severe and last longer.

**Flu symptoms**

Some of the main symptoms of flu include:

a high temperature (fever) of 38C (100.4F) or above

tiredness and weakness

a headache

general aches and pains

a dry, chesty cough

Cold-like symptoms, such as a blocked or runny nose, sneezing, and a sore throat, can also be caused by flu, but they tend to be less severe than the other symptoms you have.

Flu can make you feel so exhausted and unwell that you have to stay in bed and rest until you feel better.

**What to do**

If you're otherwise fit and healthy, there's usually no need to see your GP if you have flu-like symptoms.

The best remedy is to rest at home, keep warm and drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration. You can take paracetamol or ibuprofen to lower a high temperature and relieve aches if necessary.

Stay off work or school until you're feeling better. For most people, this will take about a week.

**10. Food poisoning  
About food poisoning**

Food poisoning is an illness caused by eating contaminated food. It's not usually serious and most people get better within a few days without treatment.

In most cases of food poisoning, the food is contaminated by bacteria, such as salmonella or Escherichia coli (E. coli), or a virus, such as the norovirus.

**Signs and symptoms**

The symptoms of food poisoning usually begin within one to two days of eating contaminated food, although they may start at any point between a few hours and several weeks later.

The main symptoms include:

feeling sick (nausea)

vomiting

diarrhoea, which may contain blood or mucus

stomach cramps and abdominal pain

a lack of energy and weakness

loss of appetite

a high temperature (fever)

aching muscles

chills

In most cases, these symptoms will pass in a few days and you will make a full recovery.

**What to do**

Most people with food poisoning recover at home and don't need any specific treatment, although there are some situations where you should see your GP for advice (see below).

Until you feel better, you should rest and drink fluids to prevent dehydration. Try to drink plenty of water, even if you can only sip it.

Eat when you feel up to it, but try small, light meals at first and stick to bland foods – such as toast, crackers, bananas and rice – until you begin to feel better.

Oral rehydration solutions (ORS), which are available from pharmacies, are recommended for more vulnerable people, such as the elderly and those with another health condition.

**11. Gout**

**About gout**

Gout is a type of arthritis in which small crystals form inside and around the joints. It causes sudden attacks of severe pain and swelling.

It's estimated that between one and two in every 100 people in the UK are affected by gout.

The condition mainly affects men over 30 and women after the menopause. Overall, gout is more common in men than women.

Gout can be extremely painful and debilitating, but treatments are available to help relieve the symptoms and prevent further attacks.

**Signs and symptoms of gout**

Any joint can be affected by gout, but it usually affects joints towards the ends of the limbs, such as the toes, ankles, knees and fingers.

**Signs and symptoms of gout include:**

severe pain in one or more joints

the joint feeling hot and very tender

swelling in and around the affected joint

red, shiny skin over the affected joint

Symptoms develop rapidly over a few hours and typically last three to 10 days. After this time the pain should pass and the joint should return to normal.

Almost everyone with gout will experience further attacks at some point, usually within a year.

**What causes gout?**

Gout is caused by a build-up of a substance called uric acid in the blood.

If you produce too much uric acid or your kidneys don't filter enough out, it can build up and cause tiny sharp crystals to form in and around joints. These crystals can cause the joint to become inflamed (red and swollen) and painful.

Things that may increase your chances of getting gout include:

obesity, high blood pressure and/or diabetes

having a close relative with gout

kidney problems

eating foods that cause a build-up of uric acid, such as red meat, offal and seafood

drinking too much beer or spirits

Read more about the causes of gout.

**Treatments for gout**

If you have gout, treatment is available from your GP to:

Relieve symptoms during an attack – this can be done using ice packs and by taking proper medications.

prevent further attacks – through a combination of lifestyle changes, such as losing weight or changing your diet, and taking medication that lowers uric acid levels, such as allopurinol

With treatment, many people are able to reduce their uric acid levels sufficiently to dissolve the crystals that cause gout – and as a result have no further attacks. However, lifelong treatment is usually required.

**12. Head lice and nits**

**About head lice and nits**

Head lice are tiny insects that live in hair. Nits are the empty egg cases attached to hair that head lice hatch from.

Head lice are a common problem, particularly in school children aged 4-11.

They're largely harmless, but can live in the hair for a long time if not treated and can be irritating and frustrating to deal with.  
 **How to get rid of head lice and nits**

Treatments to get rid of head lice are available to buy from pharmacies, supermarkets and online. You don't usually need to see your GP.

**The main treatments are:**

lotions or sprays that kill head lice – these can be very effective, but some aren't suitable for pregnant or breastfeeding women, or for children under 2

removing head lice with a specially designed comb – this is suitable for everyone and relatively inexpensive, but needs to be repeated several times and can take a long time to do thoroughly

**Preventing head lice**

It's very difficult to prevent head lice.

You may want to consider regular detection combing – for example, on a weekly basis – if you're concerned about your children or yourself.

Lotions and sprays don't prevent head lice and should only be used if a live louse has been found in your or your child's hair.

Staying off work or school and washing clothing and bedding on a hot wash is unnecessary, as it's unlikely to help prevent the spread of head lice.

**13. Headaches**

**About headaches**

More than 10 million people in the UK get headaches regularly, making them one of the most common health complaints. But most aren't serious and are easily treated.

In many cases, you can treat your headaches at home with over-the-counter painkillers and lifestyle changes, such as getting more rest and drinking enough fluids.

**When to get professional advice**

Headaches aren't usually serious and can be treated by a pharmacist. However, it's a good idea to see your GP if your headaches aren't relieved by over-the-counter treatments recommended by your pharmacist, or if they're so painful or frequent that they affect your daily activities or are causing you to miss work.  
  
**Remedies to Get Rid of Headaches Naturally**

Drink Water. Inadequate hydration may lead you to develop a headache. ...

Take Some Magnesium. ...

Limit Alcohol. ...

Get Adequate Sleep. ...

Avoid Foods High in Histamine. ...

Use Essential Oils. ...

Try a B-Complex Vitamin. ...

Soothe Pain with a Cold Compress.

**14. High cholesterol**

**About high cholesterol**

Cholesterol is a fatty substance known as a lipid. It's vital for the normal functioning of the body. Cell membranes, hormones and vitamin D are created by your body using cholesterol.

There are two main sources of the cholesterol in your blood:

cholesterol in the food you eat

cholesterol produced by your liver

Having an excessively high level of lipids in your blood (hyperlipidemia) can have an effect on your health.

High cholesterol, on its own, doesn't usually cause any symptoms but increases your risk of serious health conditions.

**About cholesterol**

Cholesterol is carried in your blood by proteins. When the two combine, they're called lipoproteins. There are two main types of lipoprotein.

High-density lipoprotein (HDL) carries cholesterol away from the cells and back to the liver. From there it's either broken down or passed out of the body as a waste product. For this reason, HDL is referred to as "good cholesterol" and higher levels are better.

Low-density lipoprotein (LDL) carries cholesterol to the cells that need it. If there's too much cholesterol for the cells to use it can build up in the artery walls, leading to disease of the arteries. For this reason, LDL is known as "bad cholesterol".

The amount of cholesterol in the blood, both HDL and LDL , is measured with a blood test.

The recommended cholesterol levels in the blood vary between those with a higher or lower risk of developing arterial disease.

**Why should I lower my cholesterol?**

Evidence strongly indicates that high cholesterol can increase the risk of:

narrowing of the arteries (atherosclerosis)

heart attack

stroke

transient ischaemic attack (TIA) – often known as a "mini stroke"

peripheral arterial disease (PAD)

This is because cholesterol can build up in the artery wall, restricting the blood flow to your heart, brain and the rest of your body. It also increases the risk of a blood clot developing somewhere in your body.

Your risk of developing coronary heart disease also rises as your blood's cholesterol level increases. This can cause pain in your chest or arm during stress or physical activity (angina).

**What causes high cholesterol?**

Many factors can increase your chances of having heart problems or a stroke if you have high cholesterol.

**These include:**

an unhealthy diet – in particular, eating high levels of saturated fat

smoking – a chemical called acrolin, found in cigarettes, stops HDL transporting cholesterol from fatty deposits to the liver, leading to narrowing of the arteries (atherosclerosis)

having diabetes or high blood pressure (hypertension)

having a family history of stroke or heart disease

There's also an inherited condition called familial hypercholesterolaemia. This can cause high cholesterol even in someone who eats healthily.

**How can I lower my cholesterol level?**

The first step in reducing your cholesterol is to maintain a healthy, balanced diet. It's important to keep your diet low in fatty food.

You can swap food containing saturated fat for fruit, vegetables and wholegrain cereals. This will also help prevent high cholesterol returning.

Other lifestyle changes, such as taking regular exercise and giving up smoking, can also make a big difference in helping to lower your cholesterol.

If these measures don't reduce your cholesterol and you continue to have a high risk of developing heart disease, your GP may prescribe a cholesterol-lowering medication, such as statins.

Your GP will take into account the risk of any side effects from statins. The benefit of lowering your cholesterol must outweigh any risks.

**15. Hyperhidrosis  
  
About hyperhidrosis**

Hyperhidrosis is a common condition in which a person sweats excessively.

The sweating may affect the whole of your body, or it may only affect certain areas. Commonly affected areas include the:

armpits

palms of your hands

soles of your feet

face and chest

groin

Both sides of the body are usually affected equally – for example, both feet or both hands.

The sweating doesn't usually pose a serious threat to your health, but it can be embarrassing and distressing. It can also have a negative impact on your quality of life and may lead to feelings of depression and anxiety.

**What is excessive sweating?**

There are no guidelines to determine what "normal" sweating is, but if you feel you sweat too much and your sweating has started to interfere with your everyday daily life, you may have hyperhidrosis.

For example, you may have hyperhidrosis if:

you avoid physical contact, such as shaking hands, because you feel self-conscious about your sweating

you don't take part in activities, such as dancing or exercise, for fear they will make your sweating worse

excessive sweating is interfering with your job – for example, you have difficulty holding tools or using a computer keyboard

you're having problems with normal daily activities, such as driving

you're spending a significant amount of time coping with sweating – for example, frequently showering and changing your clothes

you become socially withdrawn and self-conscious

**What causes hyperhidrosis?**

In many cases, hyperhidrosis has no obvious cause and is thought to be the result of a problem with the part of the nervous system that controls sweating. This is known as primary hyperhidrosis.

Hyperhidrosis that does have an identifiable cause is known as secondary hyperhidrosis. This can have many different triggers, including:

pregnancy or the menopause

anxiety

certain medications

low blood sugar (hypoglycaemia)

an overactive thyroid gland (hyperthyroidism)

infections

Read more about the causes of hyperhidrosis.

**How hyperhidrosis is treated**

Excessive sweating can be challenging to treat and it may take a while to find a treatment right for you.

Doctors usually recommend starting with the least invasive treatment first, such as powerful antiperspirants. Lifestyle changes may also help, including:

wearing loose and light clothes

avoiding triggers, such as alcohol and spicy foods, that could make your sweating worse

wearing black or white clothes to help minimise the signs of sweating

If this doesn’t help, you may be advised to try treatments such as iontophoresis (the affected area is treated with a weak electric current passed through water or a wet pad), botulinum toxin injections, and even surgery in a few cases.

Hyperhidrosis is usually a long-term condition, but some people experience an improvement with time and the treatments available can often keep the problem under control.

**16. Indigestion**

**About indigestion**

Indigestion can be pain or discomfort in your upper abdomen (dyspepsia) or burning pain behind the breastbone (heartburn).  
Dyspepsia and heartburn may occur together or on their own. Symptoms usually appear soon after eating or drinking.

**Common associated symptoms include:**

feeling full or bloated

feeling sick (nausea)

belching

bringing up (regurgitating) fluid or food into the gullet (oesophagus)

Indigestion is a common problem that affects many people, but in most cases it's mild and only occurs occasionally.

**Why it happens**

Indigestion may be caused by stomach acid coming into contact with the sensitive, protective lining of the digestive system (mucosa). The stomach acid breaks down the lining, leading to irritation and inflammation, which can be painful.

The majority of people with indigestion don't have inflammation in their digestive system. Therefore, their symptoms are thought to be caused by increased sensitivity of the mucosa (to acidity or stretching).

In most cases indigestion is related to eating, although it can be triggered by other factors such as smoking, drinking, alcohol, pregnancy, stress or taking certain medications.

**Treating indigestion at home**

Most people are able to treat indigestion with simple changes to their diet and lifestyle, or with a number of different medications, such as antacids.

Very rarely, a serious underlying health condition is the cause of indigestion. If this is suspected, then further investigation such as an endoscopy will be required (see below).  
  
home remedies for an upset stomach and indigestion include:

Drinking water. ...

Avoiding lying down. ...

Ginger. ...

Mint. ...

Taking a warm bath or using a heating bag. ...

BRAT diet. ...

Avoiding smoking and drinking alcohol. ...

Avoiding difficult-to-digest foods.  
  
Lime or lemon juice, baking soda, and water  
  
Cinnamon  
  
Cloves  
  
Cumin  
  
Coconut water  
  
Bananas

**When to get professional advice**  
  
Most people will not need to seek medical advice for their indigestion. However, your pharmacist may advise you see your GP if you have recurring indigestion and any of the following apply:

you are 55 years old or over

you have lost a lot of weight without meaning to

you have increasing difficulty swallowing (dysphagia)

you have persistent vomiting

you have iron deficiency anaemia

you have a lump in your stomach

you have blood in your vomit or blood in your stools

This is because these symptoms may be a sign of an underlying health condition, such as a stomach ulcer or stomach cancer. You may need to be referred for an endoscopy to rule out any serious cause.

An endoscopy is a procedure where the inside of the body is examined using an endoscope (a thin, flexible tube that has a light and camera on one end).

Severe indigestion can cause long-term problems with parts of your digestive tract, such as scarring of the aesophagus or the passage from your stomach. Read more about the possible complications of severe indigestion.

**17. Insomnia**

**Introduction**

Insomnia is difficulty getting to sleep or staying asleep for long enough to feel refreshed the next morning.

It's a common problem thought to regularly affect around one in every three people in the UK, and is particularly common in elderly people.

**If you have insomnia, you may:**

find it difficult to fall asleep

lie awake for long periods at night

wake up several times during the night

wake up early in the morning and not be able to get back to sleep

not feel refreshed when you get up

find it hard to nap during the day, despite feeling tired

feel tired and irritable during the day and have difficulty concentrating

Occasional episodes of insomnia may come and go without causing any serious problems, but for some people it can last for months or even years at a time.

Persistent insomnia can have a significant impact on your quality of life. It can limit what you're able to do during the day, affect your mood, and lead to relationship problems with friends, family and colleagues.

**How much sleep do I need?**

There are no official guidelines about how much sleep you should get each night because everyone is different.

On average, a "normal" amount of sleep for an adult is considered to be around seven to nine hours a night. Children and babies may sleep for much longer than this, whereas older adults may sleep less.

What's important is whether you feel you get enough sleep, and whether your sleep is good quality.

You're probably not getting enough good-quality sleep if you constantly feel tired throughout the day and it's affecting your everyday life.

**What causes insomnia?**

It's not always clear what triggers insomnia, but it's often associated with:

stress and anxiety

a poor sleeping environment – such as an uncomfortable bed, or a bedroom that's too light, noisy, hot or cold

lifestyle factors – such as jet lag, shift work, or drinking alcohol or caffeine before going to bed

mental health conditions – such as depression and schizophrenia

physical health conditions – such as heart problems, other sleep disorders and long-term pain

certain medicines – such as some antidepressants, epilepsy medicines and steroid medication

Read more about the causes of insomnia

**What you can do about it**

There are a number of things you can try to help yourself get a good night's sleep if you have insomnia.

These include:

setting regular times for going to bed and waking up

relaxing before bed time – try taking a warm bath or listening to calming music

using thick curtains or blinds, an eye mask and earplugs to stop you being woken up by light and noise

avoiding caffeine, nicotine, alcohol, heavy meals and exercise for a few hours before going to bed

not watching TV or using phones, tablets or computers shortly before going to bed

not napping during the day

writing a list of your worries, and any ideas about how to solve them, before going to bed to help you forget about them until the morning

Some people find over-the-counter sleeping tablets helpful, but they don't address the underlying problem and can have troublesome side effects.

Treatments for insomnia

Your GP will first try to identify and treat any underlying health condition, such as anxiety, that may be causing your sleep problems.

They'll probably also discuss things you can do at home that may help to improve your sleep.

In some cases, a special type of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) designed for people with insomnia (CBT-I) may be recommended.

This is a type of talking therapy that aims to help you avoid the thoughts and behaviours affecting your sleep. It's usually the first treatment recommended and can help lead to long-term improvement of your sleep.

Prescription sleeping tablets are usually only considered as a last resort and should be used for only a few days or weeks at a time.

This is because they don't treat the cause of your insomnia and are associated with a number of side effects. They can also become less effective over time.

**Treatments**

Insomnia will often improve by making changes to your bedtime habits. If these don't help, your GP may be able to recommend other treatments.

If you've had insomnia for more than four weeks, your GP may recommend cognitive and behavioural treatments or suggest a short course of prescription sleeping tablets as a temporary measure.

If it's possible to identify an underlying cause of your sleeping difficulties, treating this may be enough to return your sleep to normal.

The various treatments for insomnia are outlined below.

Good sleeping habits

Your GP will be able to advise you about what you can do at home to help you sleep. This is known as "sleep hygiene" and includes:

establishing fixed times for going to bed and waking up

creating a relaxing bedtime routine

only going to bed when you feel tired

maintaining a comfortable sleeping environment that's not too hot, cold, noisy or bright

not napping during the day

avoiding caffeine, nicotine and alcohol late at night

avoiding eating a heavy meal late at night

Read more about self-help tips for insomnia

**Treatments that aren't recommended**

The following treatments aren't normally recommended for insomnia, because it's not clear how effective they are and they can sometimes cause side effects:

antidepressants (unless you also have depression)

chloral hydrate

clomethiazole

barbiturates

herbal remedies, such as valerian extract

complementary and alternative therapies, such as acupuncture, hypnotherapy and reflexology

**18. Iron deficiency anaemia**  
**About iron deficiency anaemia**

Iron deficiency anaemia is a condition where a lack of iron in the body leads to a reduction in the number of red blood cells.

Iron is used to produce red blood cells, which help store and carry oxygen in the blood. If you have fewer red blood cells than is normal, your organs and tissues won't get as much oxygen as they usually would.

There are several different types of anaemia, and each one has a different cause. Iron deficiency anaemia is the most common type.

Other types of anaemia can be caused by a lack of vitamin B12 or folate in the body – read more about vitamin B12 and folate deficiency anaemia.

**Symptoms of iron deficiency anaemia**

Many people with iron deficiency anaemia only have a few symptoms. The severity of the symptoms largely depends on how quickly anaemia develops.

You may notice symptoms immediately, or they may develop gradually if your anaemia is caused by a long-term problem, such as a stomach ulcer.

**The most common symptoms include:**

tiredness and lack of energy (lethargy)

shortness of breath

noticeable heartbeats (heart palpitations)

a pale complexion

Less common symptoms include:

headache

hearing sounds that come from inside the body, rather than from an outside source (tinnitus)

an altered sense of taste

feeling itchy

a sore or abnormally smooth tongue

hair loss

a desire to eat non-food items, such as ice, paper or clay (pica)

difficulty swallowing (dysphagia)

painful open sores (ulcers) on the corners of your mouth

spoon-shaped nails  
  
**What causes iron deficiency anaemia?**

There are many things that can lead to a lack of iron in the body. In men and post-menopausal women, the most common cause is bleeding in the stomach and intestines.

This can be caused by a stomach ulcer, stomach cancer, bowel cancer, or by taking non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs).

In women of reproductive age, heavy periods and pregnancy are the most common causes of iron deficiency anaemia as your body needs extra iron for your baby during pregnancy.

Unless you're pregnant, it's rare for iron deficiency anaemia to be caused just by a lack of iron in your diet. However, if you do lack dietary iron, it may mean you're more likely to develop anaemia than if you have one of the problems mentioned above.

**How iron deficiency anaemia is treated**

Treatment for iron deficiency anaemia involves taking iron supplements to boost the low levels of iron in your body. This is usually effective, and the condition rarely causes long-term problems.

You'll need to be monitored every few months to check the treatment is working and your iron levels have returned to normal.

The underlying cause will need to be treated so you don't get anaemia again. Increasing the amount of iron in your diet may also be recommended.

Good sources of iron include:

dark-green leafy vegetables, such as watercress and curly kale

iron-fortified cereals or bread

brown rice

pulses and beans

nuts and seeds

meat, fish and tofu

eggs

dried fruit, such as dried apricots, prunes and raisins

**19. Itching**  
  
**About itching**

Itching is an unpleasant sensation that compels a person to scratch the affected area. The medical name for itching is pruritus.

Itching can affect any area of the body. It can either be:

generalised – where itching occurs over the whole body

localised – where itching only occurs in a particular area

Sometimes, there may be a rash or spot where the itching occurs.

Mild, short-lived itching is common, but the problem can occasionally be severe and very frustrating to live with.  
  
**Common causes of itching**

Itching can be caused by a number of different conditions, including:

skin conditions – such as eczema

allergies or skin reactions

parasitic infestations – such as scabies

insect bites and stings

fungal infections – such as athlete’s foot or vaginal thrush

hormonal changes during pregnancy or the menopause

systemic conditions (one that affects the whole body) – such as liver or kidney problems, or an overactive thyroid gland

Read more about the possible causes of itching.

**Things you can do**

If you experience troublesome itching, there are some things you can do that may help relieve it and prevent damage caused by scratching, including:

patting or tapping the itchy area, rather than scratching it

holding a cold compress, such as damp flannel, over the affected area to cool it down

bathing or showering in cool or lukewarm water

using unperfumed personal hygiene products

avoiding clothes that irritate your skin, such as wool or man-made fabrics

using a moisturiser or emollient if your skin is dry or flaky

There are also medicines, such as antihistamines and steroid creams, that are available over the counter from pharmacies that may help relieve itching caused by certain skin conditions.

**20. Leg cramps**

**About leg cramps**

Leg cramps are a common and usually harmless condition where the muscles in your leg suddenly become tight and painful.

It usually occurs in the calf muscles, although it can affect any part of your leg, including your feet and thighs.

After the cramping has passed, you may have pain and tenderness in your leg for several hours.

Three out of four cases occur at night during sleep.  
**What causes leg cramps?**  
Leg cramps can occur for no apparent reason, known as idiopathic leg cramps, or as a symptom or complication of a health condition, known as secondary leg cramps.

Causes of secondary leg cramps can include:

pregnancy

exercise

certain types of medication, such as statins (medicines that help lower cholesterol levels)

liver disease

During a cramp, your muscles suddenly contract (shorten), causing pain in your leg. This is known as a spasm, and you cannot control the affected muscle.

The cramp can last from a few seconds to 10 minutes. When the spasm passes, you will be able to control the affected muscle again.

**Treating leg cramps**

Most cases of leg cramps can be relieved by exercising the affected muscles. Exercising your legs during the day will often help reduce how often you get cramping episodes.

Stretches

To stretch your calf muscles, stand with the front half of your feet on a step, with your heels hanging off the edge. Slowly lower your heels so that they are below the level of the step. Hold for a few seconds before lifting your heels back up to the starting position. Repeat a number of times.

Medication is usually only needed in the most persistent cases where cramping does not respond to exercise.

If you have secondary leg cramps, treating the underlying cause may help relieve your symptoms.

Leg cramps that occur during pregnancy should pass after the baby is born.

Treating cramps that occur as a result of serious liver disease can be more difficult. Your treatment plan may include using medications such as muscle relaxants.

**Preventing leg cramps**

If you often get leg cramps, regularly stretching the muscles in your lower legs may help prevent the cramps or reduce their frequency.

You might find it useful to stretch your calves before you go to bed each night (see stretching advice above or try this post-exercise calf stretch).

**The following night-time advice may also help:**

If you lie on your back, make sure that your toes point upwards – placing a pillow on its side at the end of your bed, with the soles of your feet propped up against it may help keep your feet in the right position.

If you lie on your front, hang your feet over the end of the bed – this will keep your feet in a relaxed position and help stop the muscles in your calves from contracting and tensing.

Keep your sheets and blankets loose.  
  
**21. Lupus  
About lupus**

Lupus is a complex and poorly understood condition that affects many parts of the body and causes symptoms ranging from mild to life-threatening.

**Types of lupus**

There are some types of lupus that just affect the skin – such as discoid lupus erythematosus and subacute cutaneous lupus erythematosus. Some medications can also cause lupus-like side effects.

However, the term "lupus" is most often used to describe a more severe form of the condition called systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE), which can affect many parts of the body, including the skin, joints and internal organs.

Symptoms range from mild to severe, and many people will have long periods with few or no symptoms before experiencing a sudden flare-up, where their symptoms are particularly severe.

Even mild cases can be distressing and have a considerable impact on a person’s quality of life.

The rest of this article will focus on SLE.

**Signs and symptoms**

SLE can cause a wide range of symptoms, depending on the areas of the body that are affected. The most common symptoms are:

fatigue (extreme tiredness)

rashes – particularly on the face, wrists and hands

joint pain and swelling

As the symptoms of SLE can be similar to a number of other conditions, many of which are more common, it can be difficult to diagnose.

If you have persistent or troublesome symptoms that you think could be caused by SLE, you should see your GP so they can try to determine the cause.  
  
**What causes lupus?**

SLE is an autoimmune condition, which means it is caused by problems with the immune system. For reasons not yet understood, the immune system in people with SLE starts to attack and inflame healthy cells, tissue and organs.

As with other more common autoimmune conditions, such as rheumatoid arthritis, it is thought a combination of genetic and environmental factors may be responsible for triggering SLE in certain people.

**How lupus is treated**

There is currently no cure for SLE, but there are different medications that can help relieve many of the symptoms and reduce the chances of organ damage.

These medications include:

hydroxychloroquine – a medicine that has historically been used to treat malaria, but can also help treat some symptoms of SLE

corticosteroids – anti-inflammatory medications

immunosuppressants – a group of medicines that suppress your immune system

With good levels of support from friends, family and healthcare professionals, many people with SLE are able to manage their condition effectively.  
  
**22. Malnutrition  
About malnutrition**

Malnutrition is a serious condition that occurs when a person’s diet doesn't contain the right amount of nutrients.

Malnutrition means "poor nutrition" and can refer to:

undernutrition – when you don't get enough nutrients

overnutrition – when you get more nutrients than you need

This topic focuses on undernutrition. See obesity for more information about the main problems associated with overnutrition.  
**Signs of malnutrition**

The most common symptom of undernutrition is unintentional weight loss (losing 5-10% or more of your body weight over three to six months).

Other signs can include:

weak muscles

feeling tired all the time

low mood

an increase in illnesses or infections

The main sign of overnutrition is being overweight or obese. However, people with undernutrition can also be overweight if they eat a diet high in energy (calories), but low in other nutrients.

Signs of malnutrition in children can include failure to grow at the expected rate and changes in behaviour, such as appearing unusually irritable, sluggish or anxious.

Your child’s weight and physical development should be regularly assessed by your GP when your child is young. Speak to your GP or health visitor if you have any concerns about your child’s health or development.

**Treating malnutrition**

Depending on what's caused a person to become malnourished and how severe it is, treatment may be carried out at home or in hospital.

Dietary changes are the main treatment for malnutrition. If you're undernourished, you may need to increase the nutritional content of your food, with or without taking nutritional supplements.

If you're unable to eat enough to meet your nutritional needs you may need:

a feeding tube to provide nutrients directly into your digestive system

a drip to provide nutrients and fluids directly into a vein

**Preventing malnutrition**

The best way to prevent malnutrition is to eat a healthy, balanced diet.

A healthy, balanced diet is vital for maintaining health and fitness. To stay healthy, you need to eat a variety of foods from the four main food groups including:

plenty of fruit and vegetables

plenty of bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods

some milk and dairy foods

some meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non dairy sources of protein

The eat well guide shows the different types of food you need to eat (and in what proportions) to maintain a well-balanced and healthy diet.

**23. Migraine**

**About migraines**

A migraine is usually a moderate or severe headache felt as a throbbing pain on one side of the head.

Many people also have symptoms such as nausea, vomiting and increased sensitivity to light or sound.

Migraine is a common health condition, affecting around one in every five women and around one in every 15 men. They usually begin in early adulthood.

There are several types of migraine, including:

migraine with aura – where there are specific warning signs just before the migraine begins, such as seeing flashing lights

migraine without aura – the most common type, where the migraine occurs without the specific warning signs

migraine aura without headache, also known as silent migraine – where an aura or other migraine symptoms are experienced, but a headache doesn't develop

Some people have migraines frequently, up to several times a week. Other people only have a migraine occasionally. It's possible for years to pass between migraine attacks.  
  
**Causes of migraines**

The exact cause of migraines is unknown, although they're thought to be the result of temporary changes in the chemicals, nerves and blood vessels in the brain.

Around half of all people who experience migraines also have a close relative with the condition, suggesting that genes may play a role.

Some people find migraine attacks are associated with certain triggers, which can include:

starting their period

stress

tiredness

certain foods or drinks

Read more about the causes of migraines

**Treating migraines**

There's no cure for migraines, but a number of treatments are available to help reduce the symptoms.

These include:

painkillers – including over-the-counter medications such as paracetamol and ibuprofen

triptans – medications that can help reverse the changes in the brain that may cause migraines

anti-emetics – medications often used to reduce nausea and vomiting

During an attack, many people find that sleeping or lying in a darkened room can also help.

**Preventing migraines**

If you suspect a specific trigger is causing your migraines, such as stress or a certain type of food, avoiding this trigger may help reduce your risk of experiencing migraines.

It may also help to maintain a generally healthy lifestyle, including regular exercise, sleep and meals, as well as ensuring you stay well hydrated and limiting your intake of caffeine and alcohol.

If your migraines are severe or you've tried avoiding possible triggers and are still experiencing symptoms, your GP may prescribe medication to help prevent further attacks.

Medications used to prevent migraines include the anti-seizure medication topiramate and a medication called propranolol that's usually used to treat high blood pressure. It may take several weeks before your migraine symptoms begin to improve.

**24. Obesity**

**About obesity**The term 'obese' describes a person who's very overweight, with a lot of body fat.

It's a common problem in the UK that's estimated to affect around one in every four adults and around one in every five children aged 10 to 11.

**Defining obesity**

There are many ways in which a person's health in relation to their weight can be classified, but the most widely used method is body mass index (BMI).

BMI is a measure of whether you're a healthy weight for your height. You can use the BMI healthy weight chart to work out your score.

For most adults, a BMI of:

18.5 to 24.9 means you're a healthy weight

25 to 29.9 means you're overweight

30 to 39.9 means you're obese

40 or above means you're severely obese

BMI isn't used to definitively diagnose obesity, because people who are very muscular sometimes have a high BMI without excess fat. But for most people, BMI is a useful indication of whether they're a healthy weight, overweight or obese.

A better measure of excess fat is waist circumference, which can be used as an additional measure in people who are overweight (with a BMI of 25 to 29.9) or moderately obese (with a BMI of 30 to 34.9).

Generally, men with a waist circumference of 94cm (37in) or more and women with a waist circumference of 80cm (about 31.5in) or more are more likely to develop obesity-related health problems.

**Risks of obesity**

It's very important to take steps to tackle obesity because, as well as causing obvious physical changes, it can lead to a number of serious and potentially life-threatening conditions, such as:

type 2 diabetes

coronary heart disease

some types of cancer, such as breast cancer and bowel cancer

stroke

Obesity can also affect your quality of life and lead to psychological problems, such as depression and low self-esteem (see below for more information about the health problems associated with obesity).

**Causes of obesity**

Obesity is generally caused by consuming more calories – particularly those in fatty and sugary foods – than you burn off through physical activity. The excess energy is stored by the body as fat.

Obesity is an increasingly common problem because for many people modern living involves eating excessive amounts of cheap, high-calorie food and spending a lot of time sitting down, at desks, on sofas or in cars.

There are also some underlying health conditions that can occasionally contribute to weight gain, such as an underactive thyroid gland (hypothyroidism), although these type of conditions don’t usually cause weight problems if they're effectively controlled with medication.

**Treating obesity**

The best way to treat obesity is to eat a healthy, reduced-calorie diet and exercise regularly. To do this you should:

eat a balanced, calorie-controlled diet as recommended by your GP or weight loss management health professional (such as a dietitian)

join a local weight loss group

take up activities such as fast walking, jogging, swimming or tennis for 150 to 300 minutes (two-and-a-half to five hours) a week

eat slowly and avoid situations where you know you could be tempted to overeat

You may also benefit from receiving psychological support from a trained healthcare professional to help change the way you think about food and eating.

If lifestyle changes alone don't help you lose weight, a medication called orlistat may be recommended. If taken correctly, this medication works by reducing the amount of fat you absorb during digestion. Your GP will know whether orlistat is suitable for you.

In rare cases, weight loss surgery may be recommended.  
  
**25. Panic disorder**

**Introduction**

Panic disorder is where you have recurring and regular panic attacks, often for no apparent reason.

Everyone experiences feelings of anxiety and panic at certain times during their lifetime. It's a natural response to stressful or dangerous situations.

However, for someone with panic disorder, feelings of anxiety, stress and panic occur regularly and at any time.

**Anxiety**

Anxiety is a feeling of unease. It can range from mild to severe and can include feelings of worry and fear. There are several conditions that can cause severe anxiety including

phobias – an extreme or irrational fear of an object, place, situation, feeling or animal

generalised anxiety disorder (GAD) – a long-term condition that causes excessive anxiety and worry relating to a variety of situations

post-traumatic stress disorder – a condition with psychological and physical symptoms caused by distressing or frightening events

Panic attacks

A panic attack occurs when your body experiences a rush of intense psychological (mental) and physical symptoms.

You may experience an overwhelming sense of fear, apprehension and anxiety. As well as these feelings, you may also have physical symptoms such as:

nausea

sweating

trembling

a sensation that your heart is beating irregularly (palpitations)

The number of panic attacks you have will depend on how severe your condition is. Some people may have one or two attacks each month, while others may have several attacks a week.

Panic attacks can be very frightening and intense, but they're not dangerous. An attack won't cause you any physical harm, and it's unlikely that you'll be admitted to hospital if you've had a panic attack.

**What causes panic disorder?**

As with many mental health conditions, the exact cause of panic disorder isn't fully understood.

However, it's thought the condition is probably linked to a combination of physical and psychological factors.

It’s important to be aware that some physical conditions and disorders can have similar symptoms to those of anxiety. For example:

mitral valve prolapse

postural orthostatic tachycardic syndrome (POTS)

anaemia

paroxysmal atrial tachycardia – episodes of rapid and regular heartbeats that begin and end abruptly

thyrotoxicosis – where large amounts of thyroid hormones are released into the bloodstream, causing rapid heartbeat, sweating, tremor and anxiety

poorly controlled diabetes

adrenal tumours – growths that develop on the adrenal glands (two triangular-shaped glands that form part of the kidneys)

carcinoid syndrome – a set of symptoms caused by some carcinoid tumours that can develop in the cells of the endocrine system (glands that produce and secrete hormones)

Zollinger-Ellison syndrome – causes overproduction of insulin and low blood sugar (hypoglycaemia)

**Treating panic disorder**

The aim of treating panic disorder is to reduce the number of panic attacks you have and ease the severity of your symptoms.

Psychological therapy and medication are the two main types of treatment for panic disorder.

Read more about treating panic disorder and things you can do to help yourself during a panic attack.

Having panic disorder may affect your ability to drive. It's your legal obligation to inform the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) about a medical condition that could have an impact on your driving ability.

GOV.UK has further information and advice about driving with a disability or health condition.

**Complications of panic disorder**

Panic disorder is treatable, but to make a full recovery it's important that you seek medical help as soon as possible. Treatment for panic disorder is much more effective if it's given at an early stage.

Left untreated, panic disorder can become a very debilitating and isolating illness. It can also increase your risk of developing other mental health conditions, such as agoraphobia or other phobias.

Agoraphobia is a fear of being in situations where escape might be difficult, or help wouldn't be available if things go wrong.  
  
**26. Stomach ulcer**

**About stomach ulcers**

Stomach ulcers (gastric ulcers) are open sores that develop on the lining of the stomach. Ulcers can also occur in part of the intestine just beyond the stomach. These are called duodenal ulcers.

Stomach and duodenal ulcers are sometimes called peptic ulcers. This information applies to both.

**Symptoms of stomach ulcers**

Although the most common symptom of a stomach ulcer is a burning or gnawing pain in the centre of the abdomen (tummy). Not all stomach ulcers are painful.

Some people experience:

indigestion

heartburn

nausea (feeling sick)

You should speak to your GP if you think you have a stomach ulcer.

Get urgent medical advice

Speak to your GP immediately (or phone the 111 service) if:

your symptoms persist

you're vomiting blood – the blood can appear bright red or have a dark brown, grainy appearance like coffee grounds

you're passing dark, sticky, tar-like stools

you feel a sudden, sharp pain in your tummy that gets steadily worse

These could be a sign of a serious complication.

**What causes stomach ulcers?**

Stomach ulcers occur when the layer protecting the stomach lining from stomach acid breaks down. This allows the stomach lining to become damaged.

This is usually caused by:

an infection with Helicobacter pylori (H. pylori) bacteria

taking non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen or aspirin – particularly if they're taken for a long time or at high doses

There's little evidence that stress or certain foods causes stomach ulcers.

**Treating stomach ulcers**

You'll be treated using antibiotics if your ulcer was caused by a H. pylori infection. This kills the bacteria and should prevent the ulcer coming back.

You'll be treated using a proton pump inhibitor (PPI) if your ulcer was caused by NSAIDs. Your doctor will prescribe these and discuss whether you should keep using NSAIDs. Alternative medication to NSAIDs, such as paracetamol, may be recommended.

Most stomach ulcers take a few months to heal after treatment. However, stomach ulcers can come back after treatment, although this is less likely to happen if the underlying cause is addressed.

**Complications**

Complications are rare but can be very serious and potentially life-threatening.

The main complications include:

bleeding at the site of the ulcer

the stomach lining at the site of the ulcer splits open – known as perforation

the ulcer blocks the movement of food through the digestive system – known as gastric obstruction.  
  
**27. Vertigo**

**About vertigo**

Vertigo is a symptom, rather than a condition itself. It's the sensation that you, or the environment around you, is moving or spinning.

This feeling may be barely noticeable, or it may be so severe that you find it difficult to keep your balance and do everyday tasks.

Attacks of vertigo can develop suddenly and last for a few seconds, or they may last much longer. If you have severe vertigo, your symptoms may be constant and last for several days, making normal life very difficult.

Other symptoms associated with vertigo may include:

loss of balance – which can make it difficult to stand or walk

feeling sick or being sick

dizziness

Seeking medical help

You should see your GP if you have persistent signs of vertigo or it keeps coming back.

Your GP will ask about your symptoms and can carry out a simple examination to help determine some types of vertigo. They may also refer you for further tests.

**What causes vertigo?**

Vertigo is commonly caused by a problem with the way balance works in the inner ear, although it can also be caused by problems in certain parts of the brain.

Causes of vertigo may include:

benign paroxysmal positional vertigo (BPPV) – where certain head movements trigger vertigo

migraines – severe headaches

labyrinthitis – an inner ear infection

vestibular neuronitis – inflammation of the vestibular nerve, which runs into the inner ear and sends messages to the brain that help to control balance

Depending on the condition causing vertigo, you may experience additional symptoms, such as a high temperature, ringing in your ears (tinnitus) and hearing loss.

**How is vertigo treated?**

Some cases of vertigo improve over time, without treatment. However, some people have repeated episodes for many months, or even years, such as those with Ménière's disease.

There are specific treatments for some causes of vertigo. A series of simple head movements (known as the Epley manoeuvre) is used to treat BPPV.

Medicines, such as prochlorperazine and some antihistamines, can help in the early stages or most cases of vertigo.

Many people with vertigo also benefit from vestibular rehabilitation training (VRT), which is a series of exercises for people with dizziness and balance problems.

**28. Varicose veins**

**About varicose veins**

Varicose veins are swollen and enlarged veins – usually blue or dark purple – that usually occur on the legs. They may also be lumpy, bulging or twisted in appearance.

**Other symptoms include:**

aching, heavy and uncomfortable legs

swollen feet and ankles

muscle cramp in your legs

dry skin and colour changes in the lower leg

Read more about the symptoms of varicose veins.

Your GP can diagnose varicose veins based on these symptoms, although further tests may be carried out.

**Why do varicose veins happen?**

Varicose veins develop when the small valves inside the veins stop working properly.

In a healthy vein, blood flows smoothly to the heart. The blood is prevented from flowing backwards by a series of tiny valves that open and close to let blood through.

If the valves weaken or are damaged, the blood can flow backwards and collect in the vein, eventually causing it to be swollen and enlarged (varicose).

Certain things can increase your chances of developing varicose veins, such as:

pregnancy

being overweight

old age

**Treating varicose veins**

For most people, varicose veins don't present a serious health problem. They may have an unpleasant appearance, but should not affect circulation or cause long-term health problems. Most varicose veins don't require any treatment.

If treatment is necessary, your doctor may first recommend up to six months of using compression stockings, taking regular exercise and elevating the affected area when resting.

If your varicose veins are still causing you pain or discomfort – or they cause complications – they can be treated in several ways, the most common being:

endothermal ablation – treatment where heat is used to seal affected veins

sclerotherapy – this uses special foam to close the veins

ligation and stripping – this involves surgery to remove the affected veins

It's unlikely you'll receive treatment on the NHS for cosmetic reasons – you'll have to pay for this privately.

If you do feel you require treatment, it might help if you print out treatment options for varicose veins to discuss with your GP.

**Preventing varicose veins**

There is little evidence to suggest you can stop varicose veins getting worse, or completely prevent new ones developing.

However, there are ways to ease symptoms of existing varicose veins, such as:

avoiding standing or sitting still for long periods and trying to move around every 30 minutes

taking regular breaks throughout the day, raising the legs on pillows while resting to ease discomfort

exercising regularly – this can improve circulation and help maintain a healthy weight

**29. Tuberculosis (TB)**

**About tuberculosis**

Tuberculosis (TB) is a bacterial infection spread through inhaling tiny droplets from the coughs or sneezes of an infected person.

It is a serious condition, but can be cured with proper treatment.

TB mainly affects the lungs. However, it can affect any part of the body, including the glands, bones and nervous system.

**Symptoms of TB**

Typical symptoms of TB include:

a persistent cough that lasts more than three weeks and usually brings up phlegm, which may be bloody

weight loss

night sweats

high temperature (fever)

tiredness and fatigue

loss of appetite

new swellings that haven't gone away after a few weeks

You should see a GP if you have a cough that lasts more than three weeks or if you cough up blood.

**What causes TB?**

TB is caused by a bacterium called Mycobacterium tuberculosis.

TB that affects the lungs is the most contagious type, but it usually only spreads after prolonged exposure to someone with the illness. For example, it often spreads within a family who live in the same house.

In most healthy people, the immune system (the body's natural defence against infection and illness) kills the bacteria, and you have no symptoms.

Sometimes the immune system cannot kill the bacteria, but manages to prevent it spreading in the body. This means you will not have any symptoms, but the bacteria will remain in your body. This is known as "latent TB".

If the immune system fails to kill or contain the infection, it can spread within the lungs or other parts of the body and symptoms will develop within a few weeks or months. This is known as "active TB".

Latent TB could develop into an active TB infection at a later date, particularly if your immune system becomes weakened.

**How TB is treated**With treatment, TB can usually be cured. Most people will need a course of antibiotics, usually for six months.Several different antibiotics are used. This is because some forms of TB are resistant to certain antibiotics. If you are infected with a drug-resistant form of TB, treatment with six or more different medications may be needed.

If you are in close contact with someone who has TB, tests may be carried out to see if you are also infected. These can include a chest X-ray, blood tests, and a skin test called the Mantoux test.

Tuberculosis vaccination

The BCG vaccine can provide effective protection against TB in up to 8 out of 10 people who are given it.

Currently, BCG vaccinations are only recommended for groups of people who are at a higher risk of developing TB.  
This includes children living in areas with high rates of TB, or those who have close family members from countries with high TB rates, and people under the age of 16 who are going to live and work with local people in an area with high rates of TB for more than three months.

It's also recommended that some people, such as healthcare workers, are vaccinated because of the increased risk of contracting TB while working.  
  
**30. Toothache  
About toothache**

Toothache refers to pain in and around the teeth and jaws that's usually caused by tooth decay.

You may feel toothache in many ways. It can come and go or be constant. Eating or drinking can make the pain worse, particularly if the food or drink is hot or cold.

The pain can also be mild or severe. It may feel "sharp" and start suddenly. It can be worse at night, particularly when you're lying down. A lost filling or broken tooth can sometimes start the pain.

It can also sometimes be difficult to decide whether the pain is in your upper or lower teeth. When a lower molar tooth is affected, the pain can often feel like it's coming from the ear.

Toothache in other upper teeth may feel like it's coming from the sinuses, the small, air-filled cavities behind your cheekbones and forehead.

The area of your jaw close to the infected tooth may also be sore and tender to touch.

It's also possible for periodontal disease to give rise to a "dull" pain. Periodontal disease is a bacterial infection that affects the soft and hard structures that support the teeth.

**When to see your dentist**

If you have toothache for more than one or two days, visit your dentist as soon as possible to have it treated. The longer you leave it, the worse it will get.

If your toothache isn't treated, the pulp inside your tooth will eventually become infected. This can usually lead to a dental abscess, with severe and continuous throbbing pain.

Painkillers, such as paracetamol and ibuprofen, may reduce the pain and discomfort while you're waiting for an appointment. Children under 16 years of age shouldn't be given aspirin.

Find a dentist near you.

**What causes toothache?**

Toothache occurs when the innermost layer of the tooth (dental pulp) becomes inflamed. The pulp is made up of sensitive nerves and blood vessels.

Dental pulp can become inflamed as a result of:

tooth decay – this leads to holes (cavities) forming in the hard surface of the tooth

a cracked tooth – the crack is often so small that it can't be seen with the naked eye

loose or broken fillings

receding gums – where the gums shrink (contract) to expose softer, more sensitive parts of the tooth root

periapical abscess – a collection of pus at the end of the tooth caused by a bacterial infection

There are a number of other conditions that can cause pain similar to toothache, even though the pulp isn't affected. These include:

periodontal abscess – a collection of pus in the gums caused by a bacterial infection

ulcers on your gums

sore or swollen gums around a tooth that's breaking through – for example, when your wisdom teeth start to come through

sinusitis – which sometimes causes pain around the upper jaw

an injury to the joint that attaches the jaw to the skull (temporomandibular joint)

Babies can also experience discomfort when their teeth start to develop. This is known as teething.

**Treating toothache**

The type of treatment you have for toothache will depend on the cause of the pain, so your dentist will examine your mouth and may carry out an X-ray to try to identify the problem.

If your toothache is caused by tooth decay, your dentist will remove the decayed area and replace it with a filling.

If your toothache is caused by a loose or broken filling, the filling will be taken out, any decay will be removed, and a new filling put in place.  
If the pulp inside your tooth is infected, you may need root canal treatment. This procedure involves removing the infected pulp and then inserting a special type of filling to seal the tooth and prevent reinfection.

Your tooth may need to be removed if the toothache can't be treated using these methods or the tooth is wedged between another tooth and your jaw (impacted).

**Preventing toothache**

The best way to avoid getting toothache and other dental problems is to keep your teeth and gums as healthy as possible. To do this, you should:

limit your intake of sugary foods and drinks – you should have these as an occasional treat and only at mealtimes; read more about cutting down on sugar

brush your teeth twice a day using a toothpaste that contains fluoride – gently brush your gums and tongue as well

clean between your teeth using dental floss and, if necessary, use a mouthwash

don't smoke – it can make some dental problems worse

Make sure you have regular dental check-ups, preferably with the same dentist.

The time between check-ups can vary, depending on how healthy your teeth and gums are and your risk of developing future problems.

Your dentist will suggest when you should have your next check-up based on your overall oral health.

Children should have a dental check-up every six months so tooth decay can be spotted and treated early.