READY AT HOME · VOLUME 6

Symptoms & Home Care

Red flags, minor illness, medicines

Red flags: when to call 112 straight away
A-Z of common problems you can care for at home
Medicine cabinet, rehydration drink, fever guide



THE SERIES

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How to use this handbook

Start with the **red flags**. If any apply, call 112 or 999 now. Otherwise, use the A-Z to care for minor problems at home and see when to get help. This is general information, not a diagnosis. If you're worried, trust your instinct and ask for help. Always read medicine labels and ask a pharmacist about doses for children.

1. Which level of help?

CALL 112 / 999	Urgent: the red-flag signs on the next page. Don't wait, don't drive yourself.
SEE A DOCTOR TODAY	Your GP, out-of-hours GP service, or an injury unit. Problems that are getting worse, very painful, or in babies, the elderly and people with long-term illness.
ASK A PHARMACIST	Minor illness, medicine questions, the right dose for a child. Free, no appointment.
CARE AT HOME	Most colds, tummy bugs, minor cuts and sprains. Use the A-Z, and move up a level if things get worse.

Figure 1. Matching the problem to the right help.

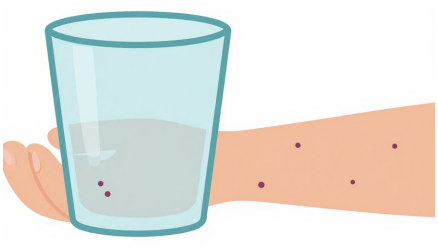
2. Red flags: call 112 or 999

Area	Call 112 / 999 if you notice...
Breathing	Struggling to breathe, can't finish a sentence, blue or grey lips, choking
Chest	Chest pain or pressure, especially spreading to arm, jaw, neck or back, or with sweating
Stroke	Face drooping, arm weakness, slurred speech (FAST, Vol 5), sudden confusion or loss of vision
Consciousness	Unresponsive, very hard to wake, fitting, sudden confusion
Bleeding	Bleeding that won't stop with firm pressure; vomiting or coughing blood
Sepsis	Infection plus any of: slurred speech or confusion; extreme shivering or muscle pain; no urine all day; severe breathlessness; says they feel extremely unwell, worse than ever before; mottled or discoloured skin
Meningitis	Fever with stiff neck, dislike of bright lights, severe headache, drowsiness, or a rash that doesn't fade under a glass
Allergy	Swelling of lips, tongue or throat, wheeze, collapse after a trigger
Injury	Serious head injury, suspected broken hip/thigh/neck/back, large or deep burns
Mental health	Someone at immediate risk of harming themselves or others

Extra red flags in babies and children

☐ Baby under 3 months with a temperature of 38°C or higher	☐ Floppy, unresponsive or very hard to wake
☐ Weak, high-pitched or continuous cry	☐ Ribs pulling in, grunting, or very fast breathing
☐ Not feeding, or far fewer wet nappies	☐ A rash that doesn't fade under a glass
☐ Pale, blotchy, blue or grey skin	☐ Fit (seizure) for the first time
☐ Bulging soft spot on a baby's head	☐ Green vomit, or vomiting with severe tummy pain

The glass test



1. Press the side of a clear drinking glass firmly against the spots or rash.
2. Look through the glass. Most rashes fade or turn pale under the pressure.
3. If the spots **stay visible** through the glass, call 112 or go to the emergency department straight away. It can be a sign of meningitis or sepsis, which need urgent treatment.
4. On darker skin, check paler areas: palms, soles, inside the eyelids and the roof of the mouth.

Someone who seems very unwell needs help even if there's no rash, or the rash fades. Trust your instinct.

3. A-Z of common problems

Problem	Care at home	See GP / pharmacist if...	Call 112 if...
Allergic reaction (mild)	Antihistamine by the label. Avoid the trigger. Cool compress for itchy skin.	Rash spreading, or keeps coming back	Swelling of lips/tongue/throat, wheeze, collapse (Vol 5)
Back pain	Keep moving gently. Heat pack. Paracetamol/ibuprofen by the label.	No better after 2 weeks, or pain down a leg	Numb groin/bottom, can't control bladder or bowel, after a fall with weakness
Bites & stings	Remove sting by scraping sideways. Wash, cold pack, antihistamine.	Spreading redness or hot swelling after 2 days; any animal or human bite that broke the skin	Signs of anaphylaxis
Blisters	Leave intact. Cover with a blister plaster.	Signs of infection	-
Burns (minor)	Cool under running water 20 min, then cover loosely (Vol 5).	Bigger than a €2 coin, or on face/hands/feet/groin: go to ED	Large, deep, electrical or chemical burns
Cold	Rest, fluids, honey and lemon (not for under 1s), paracetamol by the label.	Over 3 weeks, or earache/sinus pain getting worse	Struggling to breathe
Constipation	More water, fibre (fruit, veg, oats, prunes), move about.	Over a week, severe pain, or blood in stools	Severe tummy pain with vomiting and no wind passed
Cough	Fluids, honey (over 1s), steam, rest.	Over 3 weeks, coughing blood, or weight loss	Struggling to breathe, blue lips, chest pain
Cuts & grazes	Rinse under running water, pat dry, clean dressing.	Gaping, dirty, or infected	Bleeding you can't stop with pressure (Vol 5)
Dehydration	Sip water or rehydration drink (opposite).	Not passing urine for 8+ hours	Very drowsy, confused, sunken eyes, no urine for 12+ hours, or a floppy baby
Diarrhoea & vomiting	Small frequent sips; rehydration drink; eat plain food when ready. Wash hands, bleach toilet.	Over 2 days (adults) or 1 day (children); blood in stools	Signs of severe dehydration, vomiting blood or green fluid
Earache	Paracetamol/ibuprofen by the label, warm cloth. Usually settles in 3 days.	Over 3 days, fluid from the ear, swelling behind ear	-
Eye: red / gritty	Wash with cooled boiled water; don't rub. No contact lenses.	Painful, light-sensitive, or vision changes	Chemical in eye or sudden loss of vision
Fever	See the fever guide opposite.	Over 3 days, or a baby (see chart)	Fever with red-flag signs
Food poisoning	As diarrhoea & vomiting.	Over 2-3 days	Severe dehydration, blood, high fever
Hay fever	Antihistamine, close windows, shower after being outside.	Wheezing	-
Headache	Water, rest, paracetamol/ibuprofen by the label.	Frequent, or with vision changes	Sudden 'worst ever' headache, with stiff neck, rash, confusion, or after a head injury
Heartburn	Smaller meals, avoid late eating, antacid by the label.	Weekly or more, trouble swallowing	Chest pain spreading to arm/jaw (treat as heart attack)
Insomnia / stress	Routine, daylight, less caffeine; slow breathing (Vol 13).	Lasting weeks or affecting daily life	Thoughts of suicide: 112, or Samaritans 116 123
Nosebleed	Lean forward, pinch soft part 10-15 min (Vol 5).	Frequent. Go to ED if over 15 min, heavy, or after a head injury	Heavy, with fainting or trouble breathing

Problem	Care at home	See GP / pharmacist if...	Call 112 if...
Rash	Note when it started; cool, loose clothing.	Spreading, blistering, with fever	Doesn't fade when a glass is pressed on it (possible meningitis/sepsis)
Sore throat	Fluids, gargle warm salt water (adults), paracetamol/ibuprofen by the label.	Over a week, white patches with fever	Drooling, can't swallow saliva, struggling to breathe
Splinter	Clean tweezers, pull out at the same angle it went in, wash.	Deep, or signs of infection	-
Sprain	Rest, ice wrapped 15-20 min, support, raise (Vol 5).	Can't bear weight after a day	Deformed limb
Sunburn	Cool shower, after-sun or aloe, fluids, stay out of the sun.	Blistering over a large area	Confused, fainting (heatstroke)
Tick bite	Remove with fine tweezers or a tick remover close to the skin, pull straight up. Wash.	A spreading red 'bullseye' rash or flu-like illness within weeks (possible Lyme disease)	-
Toothache	Paracetamol/ibuprofen by the label, cold pack, avoid very hot/cold food.	See a dentist	Swelling of face/neck with fever or trouble swallowing
Urinary symptoms	Drink plenty of water.	Burning or frequent passing of urine: pharmacist (women 16-64) or GP	With high fever, back pain, shivering or confusion

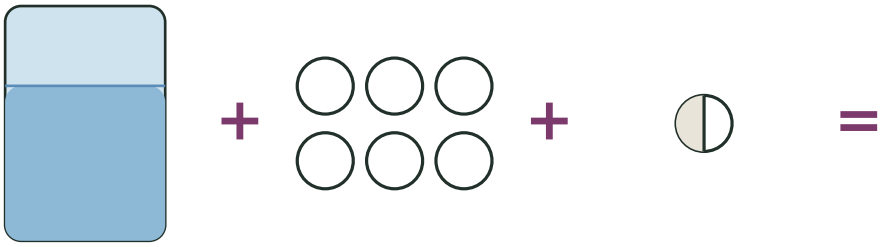
4. Fever & dehydration

Normal	About 36-37.4°C. A little higher in the evening or after exercise.
Fever	38°C or above. Usually a sign of infection. Rest, fluids, light clothing. Paracetamol or ibuprofen for comfort, by the label.
Urgent	Any baby under 3 months with 38°C or higher: contact a doctor now. Babies 3-6 months with 39°C or higher: see a GP the same day. Anyone with fever plus a red-flag sign (Section 2): 112.
Too cold	Below 35°C is hypothermia (Vol 4).

Figure 2. Fever guide. Measure under the arm or in the ear with a digital thermometer.

- Treat the child, not the number: a child who is playing and drinking is usually okay.
- Dress in light clothes; don't wrap up or sponge with cold water.
- Offer plenty of fluids. Paracetamol or ibuprofen can be given for distress, by the label, based on age and weight. Don't give both at once unless a doctor or pharmacist says so.
- Never give aspirin to anyone under 16.

Homemade rehydration drink



1 litre water
boiled & cooled

6 level tsp
sugar

½ level tsp
salt

Stir until dissolved. Sip little and often: a mouthful every 1-2 minutes if vomiting. Make fresh daily. Too much salt is dangerous, so measure carefully. Shop-bought sachets (e.g. Dioralyte) are better if you have them.

Figure 3. World Health Organization home recipe for rehydration.

5. Simple home remedies

For everyday aches, colds and stress, these simple measures genuinely help and cost very little. They work alongside medicines, not instead of getting help when you need it.



For	Try	Notes
Cough	A teaspoon of honey in warm water with lemon	Not for babies under 1 year (risk of botulism)
Sore throat	Gargle with warm salt water (half a teaspoon of salt in a glass); warm drinks, ice lollies for children	See a GP if it lasts over a week or swallowing is very hard
Blocked nose	Saline nose spray or drops; raise the head of the bed; steam from a hot shower	Avoid bowls of boiling water with children: scalds are common
Feeling sick	Small sips often; ginger biscuits or ginger tea; fresh air	Watch for dehydration (Section 4)
Indigestion, wind	Peppermint tea; smaller meals; don't lie down straight after eating	
Constipation	More water, fruit, prunes, oats; a daily walk	
Itchy skin, bites	Cool compress; a lukewarm bath with a cup of porridge oats in a sock	
Aches, stiff muscles	Warm (not hot) water bottle or warm bath; gentle stretching (Volume 13)	Ice wrapped in a cloth for fresh sprains instead
Poor sleep, worry	Regular bedtime, daylight in the morning, less caffeine after midday, box breathing (Volume 13)	Talk to someone if it's weighing on you

6. Medicine cabinet

Keep enough for a two-week emergency. Store cool, dry, locked or out of reach of children, in original packaging. Always read the label. Ask your pharmacist what suits your family.

Item	Used for	Notes
Paracetamol (adult + children's liquid)	Pain, fever	Check other products don't also contain paracetamol
Ibuprofen (adult + children's liquid)	Pain, fever, inflammation	With food. Not for everyone (asthma, stomach, kidney problems): ask a pharmacist
Antihistamine tablets/liquid	Hay fever, itchy bites, mild allergy	Some cause drowsiness
Oral rehydration sachets	Diarrhoea and vomiting	Better than homemade
Antacid	Heartburn, indigestion	
Loperamide (adults)	Diarrhoea when you must travel	Not for children, or if there's blood or fever
Antiseptic cream / wipes	Cleaning minor wounds	
Hydrocortisone 1% cream	Insect bites, mild skin irritation	Ask a pharmacist; not for the face
After-sun / aloe vera	Sunburn, minor burns after cooling	
Your prescription medicines	Long-term conditions	See below
Inhalers, EpiPens, insulin etc.	As prescribed	Note expiry dates and storage needs (insulin needs cool)

Prescription medicines: plan ahead, don't stretch them

- Ask your GP and pharmacist about keeping a small buffer (often a couple of weeks) and ordering repeats early before winter or a trip.
- Don't cut doses or skip tablets to make a supply last longer. That can make a condition flare up and is riskier than running short.
- If you're running low in an emergency, contact any pharmacy: pharmacists in Ireland can give up to 5 days' emergency supply of most medicines you've been prescribed before.
- Keep a written list of everyone's medicines, doses and allergies in the grab bag (Volume 10).

Medicine log

Name	Medicine	Dose & time	Spare until	Notes

Old medicines

Don't throw medicines in the bin or flush them. Return out-of-date medicines to your pharmacy for safe disposal.

Emergency numbers & the series

Service	Number	Use it for
Emergency services	**112 or 999**	Ambulance, Garda, fire, coast guard. Works from any phone, any network.
ESB Networks	1800 372 999	Power cuts, fallen or damaged lines (24/7)
Gas Networks Ireland	1800 20 50 50	Smell of gas (24/7). Call from outside the house.
Uisce Éireann (Irish Water)	1800 278 278	Water outages, burst mains, boil-water notices
HSELive	1800 700 700	Health service information
Public Poisons Line	01 809 2166	Advice if someone has swallowed or touched something harmful (8am-10pm daily)
Samaritans	116 123	Anyone struggling to cope (24/7)
Text About It	Text HELLO to 50808	Free text support (24/7)
Childline	1800 66 66 66	Children and young people up to 18 (24/7)
Your county council		Roads, flooding, local emergency centres
Met Éireann	met.ie / Met Éireann app	Weather warnings

Numbers checked November 2026. Write in your county council's number above, and your own local numbers (GP, out-of-hours doctor, pharmacy, vet, neighbours) in Volume 0.

The Ready At Home series

Vol	Title	What it covers
0	Start Here	Household plan & emergency numbers
1	Just Add Water	Home-dehydrated emergency meals
2	Power Cuts & Storms	Getting through long outages
3	Water & Sanitation	Storing, treating, toilets
4	Cooking & Warmth	Without mains power
5	First Aid	Step-by-step emergency care
6	**Symptoms & Home Care**	Red flags, minor illness, medicines
7	Home Systems & Repairs	Shut-offs, leaks, storm damage, floods
8	Fire Safety & Security	Alarms, escape plans, extinguishers
9	Communications	Family plan, radios, signals
10	Grab Bags & Kits	72-hour, car, child & pet kits
11	Pantry & Stockpile	A 30-day food store you rotate
12	Outdoor Skills	Fire, shelter, knots, navigation
13	Kids, Morale & Wellbeing	Keeping people okay
14	Offline Knowledge & Media	Libraries, maps & media without internet
15	Other Emergencies	Radiation, chemicals, heat, illness, cut off

This series gives general preparedness guidance. It is not a substitute for professional medical, electrical, gas or structural advice, or for a certified first-aid course. In an emergency, call 112 or 999 and follow the call-taker's instructions.

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