- First aid



The clinic

WOMAN'S GP DR HELEN WALL ON HER TOPIC OF THE WEEK

What you really need in your first aid kit



Want to start the new year afresh? The most important place to declutter could be your medicine cabinet...

FEELING CONFUSED?

Going online to nhs.uk or calling NHS 111 online can help – they can offer plenty of self-care advice for everyday minor illnesses to go alongside your well-stocked home, but don't be afraid to ask your local pharmacist too.

With 2025 now underway, many of us will be feeling more motivated to change up our lives – including our first aid cabinets. Or maybe you don't have a place at home to store all your essential medicines. Either way, I'm here to help. A well-stocked medicine and first aid cupboard can help you treat many common illnesses and problems, often reducing the need to venture out at the worst-possible time.

While you can readily buy a pre-packed first aid kit, they don't always have everything that I would want at home. I make my own with relatively cheap items available from many pharmacies, discount and high-street stores. For me, a good first aid kit includes bandages, scissors, plasters, antiseptic wipes and cream, an eye bath and wash, gauze, burns gel, a thermometer and medical tape.

STOCK UP

When it comes to over-the-counter medication, supplies should include paracetamol and ibuprofen to reduce pain and fevers, together with oral rehydration sachets to replace any lost salts and fluids due to vomiting and diarrhoea. I'd also consider anti-diarrhoea medications (although these should be used with caution if diarrhoea is ongoing or if there is any significant pain), antihistamines to help with allergies, decongestants for annoying colds, and heartburn relief remedies.

Don't be afraid to buy the cheaper 'generic' versions of these medications over more expensive, branded ones. If the active ingredient is the same, the effect will be the same too. But, as with all over-the-counter medicines, seek medical advice if symptoms go on longer than expected or you have worsening or added symptoms.

TIME TO BIN

All medicines will have an expiry date and just like food they can go well past their best. The most likely problem is that over time the active ingredients in medicines can break down, meaning it won't work as well.

Very occasionally some medicines can break down into more harmful substances and become toxic, although this would not happen straight away. Legally, a pharmaceutical company has to guarantee the safety and efficacy of a medicine, and it can only do this by putting a hard stop date on the packet. For any life-saving medications, like EpiPens and insulin, make sure you replace these before your old ones are due to expire, so you're always protected.

Storing your medicines is key to ensuring they work in the way they're meant to. Keep them in a cool, dry location (avoid storing them in the bathroom). Always follow the directions on medicine packets and never take more than the stated dose. In particular, keep your medicines away from children.

FACT OR FICTION? COFFEE CAN AFFECT YOUR GROWTH

Fiction! Good news, coffee lovers. Drinking your daily brew doesn't affect your height. A study published in the *National Library of Medicine* found that caffeine doesn't directly affect bone health, which can lead to a loss of height. However, it can reduce calcium absorption, so add milk to your cup to avoid this.

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