Community pharmacies are often best known for dispensing prescriptions, but their role can extend well beyond handing over a box of tablets. Depending on the pharmacy, its staff and the services commissioned locally, you may be able to get advice about long-term medicines, help with repeat prescriptions, treatment for some common conditions and vaccinations.

Knowing what your pharmacy can do may save you time and help you use medicines more safely. Services differ across the UK, too: NHS Pharmacy First is an England service, while arrangements in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are different. It is sensible to check with your local pharmacy before making a special journey.

Community pharmacy beyond dispensing

Pharmacists are medicines experts. They can explain how to take a medicine, discuss possible side effects and help you understand what to do if a dose is missed. They can also advise on over-the-counter treatments and identify when symptoms need assessment by a GP, NHS 111 or another service.

For people living with conditions such as asthma, diabetes, high blood pressure or heart disease, medicines may be part of an ongoing care plan. A pharmacist can help you use prescribed treatments as intended and raise concerns if something is not working well. They do not replace your GP or specialist, and they cannot change every prescription independently. But they can often help you work out the right next step.

Long-term medicines review: getting more from your treatment

A **long term medicines review** is a chance to check whether your medicines still suit your health needs and how you take them in everyday life. You might ask for a conversation if you are unsure why you take a medicine, are struggling with a complicated schedule, have noticed a side effect or have recently started treatment after a hospital stay.

In a community pharmacy, the pharmacist may be able to discuss practical issues, such as the best time to take a medicine or whether a particular formulation is easier to use. They may also spot possible interactions or explain how a prescribed medicine fits with non-prescription products. If the review identifies a clinical concern, the pharmacist can advise you to contact your GP or another prescriber. Any changes to prescribed treatment should be agreed with an appropriate healthcare professional; do not stop a regular medicine without advice.

Not every pharmacy offers a formal, dedicated long-term review appointment. Ask whether the pharmacist can speak with you privately and whether your question can be handled there. Take an up-to-date medicines list, including inhalers, creams, vitamins and supplements, if you have one.

How this differs from a structured medication review

A **structured medication review NHS** is a formal, personalised review of a person's medicines, usually provided through their GP practice by a pharmacist or another appropriately trained healthcare professional. It may be offered to people with particular health needs, such as taking many medicines, experiencing frailty or having medicines-related problems. Eligibility and how reviews are arranged can vary.

A community pharmacist's advice can complement this work, but it is not automatically the same as a structured medication review. If you think you may benefit from one, ask your GP practice whether a review is appropriate. You can also discuss day-to-day concerns with your community pharmacist, who may help you prepare questions or direct you to the right clinician.

Repeat prescription support pharmacy teams can provide

Managing regular prescriptions can become difficult, especially if you take several medicines or have changes to your treatment. **Repeat prescription support pharmacy** services may help you understand the process and avoid running short, although the exact arrangement depends on your local pharmacy and GP practice.

Pharmacy staff may be able to explain how to request your next supply, check whether your prescription is ready or tell you what to do if an item is missing. Some pharmacies collect prescriptions from GP practices or offer delivery to eligible patients, but these services are not universal. A pharmacy may also contact the prescriber if there is a query about a prescription.

In many areas, patients order repeat prescriptions themselves through their GP practice, the NHS App or another approved route. Your pharmacy may then dispense the prescription once it has been issued. Do not assume that the pharmacy automatically orders every repeat for you: confirm who is responsible for requesting it and allow enough time for the GP practice and pharmacy to process it.

Practical steps to avoid a gap in medicines

1. Check which items are due and whether any have been changed or stopped by your prescriber.
2. Order through the method your GP practice specifies, allowing time for approval and dispensing.
3. Contact the pharmacy before collection if you need to check whether the prescription is ready or whether an item is temporarily unavailable.
4. If you are running out and cannot obtain your usual supply, contact your pharmacy or GP practice promptly for advice. Do not borrow someone else's medicine or alter your dose to make it last.

For some medicines, a prescriber may need to review your health or arrange monitoring before issuing more. Blood tests and other checks are particularly important for certain treatments. Keeping appointments and responding to monitoring requests can help prevent delays.

NHS Pharmacy First and faster access for some conditions

NHS Pharmacy First in England gives people access to advice and, where clinically appropriate, treatment for seven common conditions through participating community pharmacies. The service is designed to make care more convenient and may avoid the need for a GP appointment for an eligible problem. It is not a general replacement for GP care, and the pharmacist will assess whether the service is suitable for you.

The conditions covered in England are:

- earache, for eligible people aged 1 to 17;
- impetigo, for people aged 1 year and over;
- infected insect bites, for people aged 1 year and over;
- shingles, for people aged 18 and over;
- sinusitis, for people aged 12 and over;



- sore throat, for people aged 5 and over; and
- urinary tract infection (UTI), for eligible women aged 16 to 64.

The pharmacist asks about your symptoms and health history, then decides what care is appropriate. That could include self-care advice, a suitable treatment, or referral to a GP, NHS 111 or urgent care. Antibiotics are not automatically supplied: they are only appropriate in some cases, following a clinical assessment.

You can contact a participating pharmacy directly or, in England, be referred through NHS 111 or another route. Use the NHS England website or NHS service information to check current eligibility and find out how to access the service. In other UK nations, ask your local pharmacy or health service about the equivalent arrangements.

Vaccinations and travel health in pharmacies

Many pharmacies provide **flu vaccinations**, subject to the current NHS programme, eligibility criteria and local availability. Some also offer vaccinations privately. Eligibility for an NHS flu jab can change between seasons, so check current guidance or ask the pharmacy whether you qualify and whether an appointment is needed.

Pharmacies may also offer **travel vaccinations** and **travel health consultations with risk assessment**. A consultation can consider your destination, planned activities, length of stay, medical history and existing vaccinations. The pharmacist or travel health professional can explain which precautions or vaccines may be relevant and whether you need to contact your GP or a specialist travel clinic.

Plan ahead: some vaccines need more than one dose or take time to provide protection. Take your travel itinerary and vaccination records to the appointment if available. Not every pharmacy provides every travel service, and some vaccines or consultations may be private rather than NHS-funded. Confirm what is offered, whether a prescription is needed and what charges apply before booking.

What a pharmacy can—and cannot—do

Pharmacy service

How it may help

What to check

Medicines advice

Explains how to use medicines and helps with practical questions or possible side effects.

Ask whether you need a private consultation or a GP review for your concern.



Repeat prescription support

Helps you understand ordering, collection and what to do if a supply is delayed.

Confirm whether you or the pharmacy must request the next prescription.

NHS Pharmacy First in England

Assesses eligible symptoms and may provide treatment or direct you to other care.

Check the age and condition criteria and whether the pharmacy participates.

Vaccination and travel health

May include a flu jab, travel vaccines and personalised prevention advice.

Check availability, eligibility, appointment requirements and any charges.

A pharmacist may need to refer you if symptoms are severe, persistent, unusual or outside the service's scope. Seek urgent help for serious symptoms rather than waiting for a routine pharmacy appointment. If you are uncertain where to go, NHS 111 can advise in England; the equivalent service varies elsewhere in the UK.

Are pharmacy services free?

Some services are funded by the NHS for people who meet the relevant criteria; others may be private or subject to local arrangements. Charges can depend on the service, location and your circumstances. healthylifeessex.co.uk **No prices were stated in the scraped content**, so it would be misleading to give figures or imply that a particular service is free everywhere. Ask the pharmacy for current costs before booking, especially for travel vaccinations and travel consultations.

Making your pharmacy visit useful

Before you go, write down what you want to ask and bring a list of your medicines if the discussion concerns long-term treatment. For a new symptom, note when it began, what makes it better or worse, and any treatments you have already tried. Mention allergies, pregnancy, other health conditions and recent changes to medicines.

Community pharmacies can provide a convenient first point of contact for many everyday health and medicines questions. They can support safer use of long-term treatment, help you navigate repeat supplies, assess certain common conditions through NHS Pharmacy First in England and offer vaccination or travel health services where available. If your needs are more complex, the pharmacist can help you identify the right next step—including contacting your GP practice for a formal structured medication review NHS service where appropriate.