

# GUIDELINES FOR AILMENTS TREATABLE BY OVER-THE-COUNTER MEDICATION: PRACTICAL GUIDELINES USED BY THE COMMUNITY PHARMACY IN THE NETHERLANDS

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## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Over-the-counter (OTC) medicines are widely available and purchased by consumers. These medicines are often used to treat minor ailments. However, evidence regarding their effectiveness is sometimes lacking. Therefore, the Medicines Information Centre of the KNMP has set up evidence-based guidelines for OTC medicine use when treating minor ailments.

## PURPOSE

The guidelines of ailments can help translate patient information into suitable advice. Working with guidelines is in line with the professionalization of the pharmacy profession. It is part of the quality policy that most pharmacies in The Netherlands work with. The guidelines have a number of advantages:

1. Patients can receive tailor-made advice.
2. The guidelines are evidence-based. The chance that the advice helps is therefore greater.
3. The patient is most likely to get the same advice at different pharmacies.

## METHOD

The guidelines are set up in collaboration with healthcare professionals. In order to set up these guidelines literature, summary of product characteristics and existing guidelines are carefully evaluated.

The guideline focuses on a complaint or condition and contains the following information:

- **Key points:** the guideline starts with a summary of the key points. This contains a brief description of the most important information and the first choice products from the guideline.

- **Ailment:** in this part of the guideline background information of the condition is given. An overview of the symptoms is also given

- **WHAM questions:** the guidelines of ailments suggest to ask about the complaints first and then ask the WHAM questions.

WHAM stands for:

W: Who is it for?

H: How long have the symptoms been present?

A: What actions have been taken so far?

M: What medication has been tried already?

The WHAM questions can be used as a tool to collect more information and to take the specific circumstances of the patient into account.

Some questions in the guideline are already pre-filled.

E.g. the W-question (who is the advice intended for?) could state that a different advice applies to a 3-month-old baby than for a 35-year-old man or a 75-year-old woman.

- **Non-medicinal advice:** this describes which measures patients can take themselves (i.e. without using an over-the-counter product or in addition to using a OTC medicine).

- **Medicinal advice:** this section describes which OTC medicines you can advise and which medicines are first and second choice.

- **When to refer to the general practitioner (GP).** The patient must also know what to do if the complaints – despite the advice – are not alleviated.

- **What not to use:** in this section medicines that are not recommended to use are described. These are often old remedies or remedies whose effectiveness have not been demonstrated.

- **Prescription medicines:** this section describes which prescription medicines the GP can prescribe if the over-the-counter medicine does not help enough or if the complaint is too serious to be treated with an OTC medicine.

- **Additional information:** finally, there is an overview of additional information that is available, such as the KNMP public brochure, information on Apotheek.nl and the accompanying Knowledge Test, when available.

## RESULTS

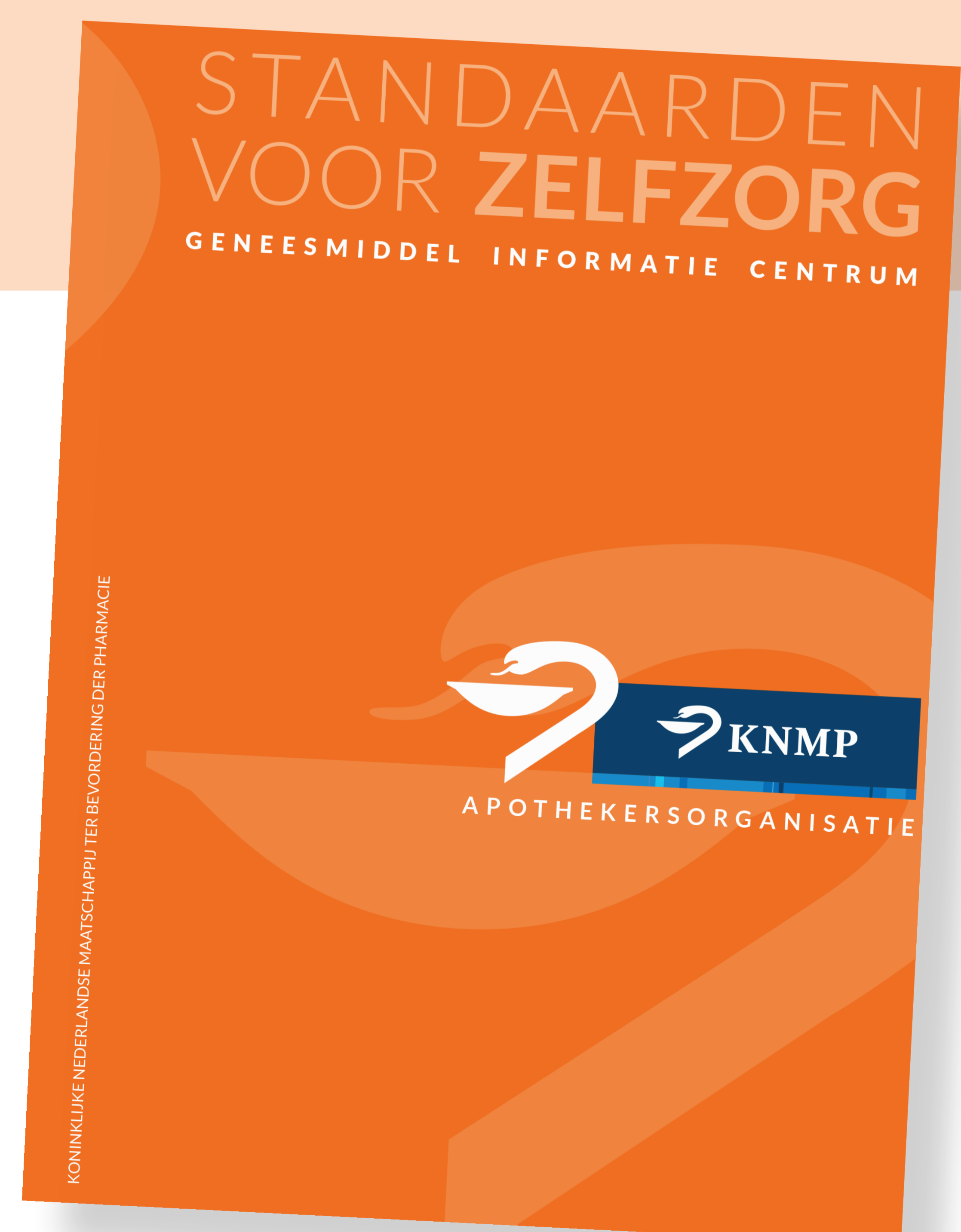
Currently there are more than 20 guidelines available. The available guidelines for ailments can be seen in table 1. These guidelines are widely used by pharmacists and pharmacy technicians. Furthermore, these guidelines are used for educational purposes.

Table 1: available guidelines for ailments

Dutch	English
aambeien	hemorrhoids
acne	acne
allergische rinitis	allergic rhinitis
diarree	diarrhea
eikenprocessierups	oak processionary
hoofdluis	head lice
hoofdpijn	headache
hoofdroos	dandruff
kinderziektes	teething problems
koortslip	cold sore
maagklachten	stomach problems
menstruatiepijn	menstrual pain
noodanticonceptie	emergency contraception
reisziekte	motion Sickness
spierpijn, gewrichtspijn en kneuzing	muscle pain, joint pain and bruising
stoppen met roken	quitting smoking
vaginale schimmelinfectie	vaginal yeast infection
verkoudheid en griep	cold and flu
verstopping	intestinal blockage
voetschimmel	athlete's foot
wonden	wounds
wormen	worms
wratten	warts

## CONCLUSIONS

The practical guidelines set up for ailments are available both in book and online. They help pharmacists and pharmacy technicians in providing evidence-based recommendations and in improving medication safety



## References

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2. Consultvoering. Koninklijke Nederlandse Maatschappij Ter Bevordering Der Pharmacie. [2022 Aug 18]. Available from: <https://www.knmp.nl/richtlijnen/consultvoering>



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