

**LEXI**

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That online advert? Was that legit?

**PADDY**

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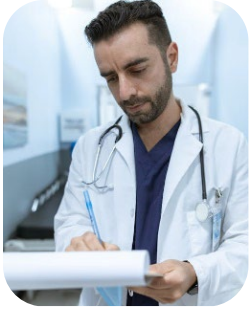
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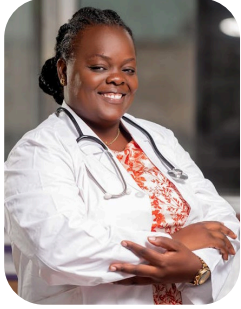
If a medicine is 'prescription only', only a health professional such as a doctor, dentist or specially trained nurse or pharmacist, can give their permission for this to be given or sold to someone. We can prescribe medicines to help lots of people with their physical or mental health. If a prescription medicine is being sold without it being prescribed directly by a healthcare professional, then it is being sold illegally. One way to tell is if it says POM (prescription-only medicine) on the box.

It's really important that we know about any other medication (including any herbal medicines) someone is taking before we write a prescription, and that if someone is already on a prescription, they check with their doctor to see if taking other medicine is safe. This is because medicines and other substances can interact with each other, and taking one might reduce the effectiveness of another, or cause someone to have a bad reaction.

Not only do pharmacists give out medicines prescribed by a doctor - we also give medicines that might not need a doctor's prescription, but still need to be dispensed by a trained healthcare professional, such as travel sickness medicine. Sometimes, these will have the letter 'P', for pharmacy, on the box. These can't be bought in a normal shop on the shelf.

We will ask careful questions to make sure that we're giving medicine safely, and that the person using it knows how to take it properly. If someone needs to pick up a prescription for another person, we'll need to check it's going to the right person by asking a few questions. Sometimes, we might refer someone to the doctor if they need more attention for their health needs.





Some medicines can be bought in a shop, for example a supermarket, without needing a prescription or pharmacist. These are called General Sales List Medicines, or can be known as ‘over-the-counter’ medicines. These include medicines for illnesses such as a cold or flu, to treat allergies, or mild pain such as headaches. These medicines aren’t meant to be taken for a long period of time, or to treat more serious conditions – it is important to always talk to a doctor in these cases.

Sometimes, people might buy and use a substance that has not been tested or regulated, for example online. But, because these substances haven’t been extensively tested and are not licensed, they might carry unknown risks.

Medicines available for sale as ‘over-the-counter’ medicines are carefully tested according to strict controls. It’s really important to follow the instructions given with any ‘over-the-counter’ medicine to make sure it is used safely.

If someone has a negative reaction to a medicine, or needs any other medical care, they should always tell the doctors and nurses what they have taken, so these medical professionals can make sure the right treatment can be given.



<b>Key term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Prescription	A written direction for a medicine that someone needs and how to use it, given by a doctor, dentist, trained pharmacist, or other specialist healthcare professional.
Pharmacy	A shop, or part of a shop, where medicines are prepared and sold, or given as a prescription.
Herbal medicine	Medicines with ingredients from plants. These can be harmful if they cause an allergic reaction, interact badly with other medicines being used, or are used incorrectly. To be sold legally, these must be approved by official regulators.
Short-term condition	A condition that might last a few days, weeks, or months, that can be managed and will pass with rest, medicines, or other intervention or treatments.
Long-term (chronic) condition	A condition which requires a longer-term treatment plan with intervention such as medicine, therapy, or other prescribed treatments.

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What's up? Is the stress about college?

**PADDY**

**LEXI**

It's not just college – exams are stressful, but I've felt like this for a while. I just feel overwhelmed and I'm struggling to keep up with everything I need to do. Thinking about going to see a doctor makes me feel even more anxious. I've never booked an appointment for myself. Buying online seems easier to me.

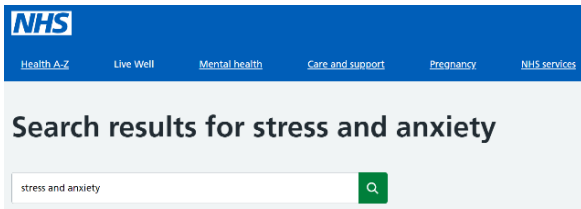
It sounds like it would help to speak to someone though. Or at least find out some more information before you do anything.

What if I have to wait ages for an appointment? I saw someone online talking about ordering some tablets that they said can help, but other people were saying they weren't safe. I don't know what to do.

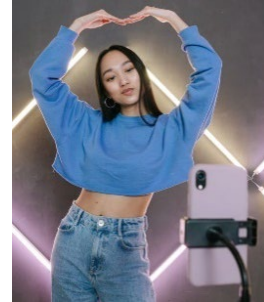
- 1) **Why might Lexi feel tempted to buy substances online?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2) **What might the risks be of buying substances online?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3) **What might the benefits be of talking to a healthcare professional?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 4) **How could Lexi overcome any barriers that might prevent her from speaking to a doctor?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 5) **Where might Lexi go to find reliable information about substances, including medicines? What sources of information might be less reliable?**

Look at the sources of information about looking after health and wellbeing and buying substances. Which of these might be more reliable?

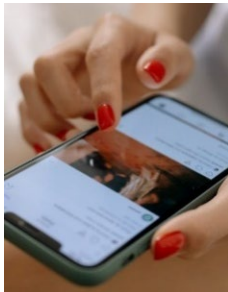
**a) NHS website**



**b) Lifestyle and wellness influencer on social media**



**c) Social media advert for coping with stress and anxiety**



**d) Information from a local pharmacy or GP service**



**e) A website that calls itself an online pharmacy**



**f) Family and friends**



**1) Why might Lexi feel tempted to buy substances online?**

Lexi might feel tempted to buy substances online if she is trying to find a quick way to cope with the pressures she is facing. She might be feeling nervous or worried about talking to a parent or carer, if she doesn't want them to know how she is feeling. She might be worried about waiting for a GP appointment if she isn't able to get one quickly, or nervous about contacting a GP surgery on her own for the first time.

**2) What might the risks be of buying substances online?**

If Lexi buys medicines from an unregulated shop online, they may not be effective or safe. For example, they may contain unknown substances such as synthetic opioids, or a higher dosage than is safe. If the contents of what she has bought aren't known, her body might react badly to them. And if she has a long-term condition, or one that requires further investigation, she won't receive the help she needs. Students might suggest Lexi is talking about buying benzodiazepines online. It is important for Lexi to know that benzodiazepines are a controlled substance, which can only be given by medical professionals in strict conditions. Benzodiazepines sold online may have been adulterated with other substances, and it is impossible to know how powerful these are. This could lead to serious health complications and may worsen Lexi's mental wellbeing. It is important for Lexi to know that buying these substances online would be a criminal offence.

**3) What might the benefits be of talking to a healthcare professional?**

Talking to a healthcare professional may help if they can give Lexi different ways to cope with her stress, which can be monitored over time. She can ask for more help or information if she needs it. If she's 18 or under and in full-time education, any prescription a doctor might give her will be free.

**4) How could Lexi overcome any barriers that might prevent her from speaking to a doctor?**

It could help Lexi to know there are different ways she can get a GP appointment – many GPs offer face-to-face or phone appointments, or access through an online portal such as an app. If she is worried and needs to speak to a doctor outside of daytime hours or at the weekend, she can find a local out-of-hours GP service or contact NHS 111. If Lexi is struggling to access professional support on her own, she can speak to another trusted adult such as a form tutor.

**5) Where might Lexi go to find reliable information about substances, including medicines? What sources of information might be less reliable?**

The most reliable source of information about medicines, as well as the most reliable way to access medicine, is from a healthcare professional. This can include checking the NHS website for information about medicines or any concerns someone might have, or talking to a local GP or pharmacist, whether in person, over the phone, or on their website. All registered online pharmacies in Britain will be listed on the General Pharmaceutical Council's website, meaning that their practices are regularly reviewed by an overseeing body. If a website can't be found on this register, it will be unregulated and might be carrying out unsafe practices, or giving unreliable advice.

Everyone's body will respond in different ways to different medicines and substances. Online influencers may have been asked to partner with or promote a company or website. Sometimes these may be for known and trusted organisations such as the NHS; sometimes, these might be for other websites that may not be regulated. Family and friends may have a range of opinions or suggestions about how to look after health and wellbeing. These can be helpful, but it is important never to act on this advice without also getting a professional opinion from a registered healthcare practitioner, such as a doctor or nurse.



When someone is taking medicine, it is really important they know that they are using the right type of medicine, the right amount, and that it has come from a safe source.

Medicines dispensed from a safe and reliable source will always have clear instructions about how they should be taken. Two people might be using what they think is the same medicine, but there might be important differences like the dosage – how powerful the medicine is (sometimes measured in mg or ml). That is why it is important to never give a prescription medicine to someone it is not intended for, or to borrow someone else's prescription medicine.

The safest way to access medicine is to speak to a doctor, pharmacist, or another healthcare professional who is trained to write prescriptions.

There are online pharmacies that some people use, and it can be hard to tell which are safe. In Britain, all pharmacies must be registered with the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC).

One way someone can check that a pharmacy is licensed to dispense medicines is if it clearly says this on their website. They should double check by seeing if the name is on the GPhC register.



As a doctor, I would always want someone to talk to their GP if they have any questions about challenges they are facing with their physical or mental health.

We know that sometimes it can take longer to get an appointment than we might want, but there are lots of ways someone can get help.

Lots of GP surgeries have emails or websites that can help to give more information, or that someone can use to describe a problem they're having. Others might be able to help patients over the phone or use an online consultation service where patients can describe their symptoms or ask questions via an online form, which a doctor will check.

Websites like [111.nhs.uk](https://www.111.nhs.uk) can help people find information they need, or local pharmacists can often help too.

If someone has used a medicine or another substance to treat a problem they are having, and they are having a bad reaction, they should call 999 and describe what they have taken to the handler. If they have a concern, but it isn't life threatening, they can call 111, go to an urgent treatment centre, or see an out-of-hours GP for an appointment.