



WWHAM cheat sheet

The 5-question framework for safe over-the-counter consultations. Print, laminate, keep on the counter.

W

Who is it for?

Identify the patient. Is the customer asking on their own behalf or for someone else? Age (especially under 16 or over 65), pregnant or breastfeeding, any existing conditions.

- Is this for you or someone else?
- How old are they?
- Are they pregnant or breastfeeding? (where relevant)
- Do they have any long-term conditions?

W

What are the symptoms?

Describe the problem in detail. Location, severity, character, associated symptoms, any pattern. Use open then closed questions.

- Can you describe what's happening?
- Where exactly is the symptom?
- How would you rate it from 0 to 10?
- Anything else going on at the same time?

H

How long has it been going on?

Onset, duration, and pattern. Acute, chronic, recurrent, getting better or worse, intermittent vs constant.

- When did it start?
- Is it constant or does it come and go?
- Getting better, worse or the same?
- Have you had this before?

A

Action already taken?

Self-care, over-the-counter products tried, home remedies, dose taken, response. Helps avoid duplication and assess severity.

- Have you tried anything for it?
- Did it help?
- How much, how often, for how long?
- Have you spoken to anyone else (GP, NHS 111)?

M

Medication being taken?

Prescription medication, regular OTC, herbal or supplements, allergies, recent changes. Critical for interactions and contraindications.

- Any prescription medicines?
- Anything you buy regularly off the shelf?
- Herbal or vitamin supplements?
- Allergies or sensitivities?

■ Refer to the pharmacist if any of these are present:

- Sudden severe symptoms (e.g. 'thunderclap' headache, severe abdominal pain)
- Any unexplained bleeding (vomit, stools, urine, sputum)
- Non-blanching rash, neck stiffness, photophobia (meningitis)
- Unintentional weight loss, persistent fever or night sweats
- Symptoms worsening despite OTC treatment
- Symptoms in babies under 1, pregnancy, or the immunocompromised
- Chest pain, breathlessness at rest, palpitations or syncope
- Suicidal thoughts or significant mental-health deterioration

Practise WWHAM with realistic AI patients — free scenarios at ppets.co.uk