



July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2025

**Dear Telehealth Triage Nurse Colleague, Call Center Leadership, and Software Partner:**

In 2023 we published a new content set of **Adult Care Advice Topics** to use along with the Adult After-Hours and Office-Hours STCC Telehealth Triage Guidelines.

In 2025 we updated and expanded this content set.

The Adult Care Advice Topics (ACATs) provide **care advice** and **health information** for telehealth patients, their family, and caregivers. Most ACATs are symptom-based (such as Cough or Knee Pain). Some are diagnosis-based (such as Common Cold and COVID-19). Other *Types* of ACATs include injury and exposure to infection.

Every topic is written using the principles of health literacy and plain language. Most topics are written at the 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> grade reading level (average 5<sup>th</sup> grade). Most topics are 1 to 4 pages in length (average 2.5 pages).

An ACAT can be used as a “handout” to reinforce patient education and care advice given during a triage encounter. A telehealth triager can share one or more of these topics with a patient (or caregiver) at the end of an encounter. Here is an example user scenario.

Maria Gomez was in her garden and was stung by a bee. She calls into her healthcare system’s nurse advice line and talks to Kathy Jones RN.

Kathy selects and uses the *Bee or Yellow Jacket Sting* telehealth triage guideline. Kathy triages Maria and determines that the symptoms are minor and can be treated at home.

Kathy provides key care advice over the phone including *Call Back If* instructions. The triage software suggests 3 linked Adult Care Advice Topics. Kathy selects 2 to send.

- ☒ Bee Sting
- ☒ Over-The-Counter Antihistamine Medicines
- ☐ Over-The-Counter Pain Medicines

Following the health system’s protected health information (PHI) processes, Kathy attaches the two PDFs to an email that she then sends immediately to Maria.

Maria is delighted with the care that Kathy provided and grateful to have easy-to-read handouts to use and reference.

### Why are ACATs important and helpful?

ACATs provide important patient education. Sharing an ACAT handout with a patient or caregiver is *health information therapy*. These handouts can benefit the patient, the triage nurse, and our software partners.

- They improve patient understanding. Verbally delivered care advice is poorly retained by patients and caregivers. Sending an ACAT after a call gives the patient a helpful handout for ongoing use and reference.
- They decrease call times and call backs. Giving a large amount of verbal advice lengthens triage calls. A triager can shorten call times by giving just key care advice verbally and then sending one or more ACATs after the encounter.
- They increase patient and telehealth provider satisfaction. They allow the triager to continue to support the patient with helpful care advice and health information after the encounter.
- They improve quality of care by delivering consistent evidence-based care information.

### How many ACATs are there?

We have added **52** new topics since last year. There are now **212 topics** available in **July 2025**. These topics cover the most common reasons (reasons for call) people call a nurse advice line.

Our editorial team has prioritized future topic development based on frequency of telehealth guideline utilization, patient safety, and clinical partner input.

We will continue to expand the number of topics as we work towards the 2025 annual update.

### Are the ACATs consistent with the adult telehealth triage guidelines?

Yes. Each topic was developed directly from the adult STCC telehealth triage guidelines and protocols. The care advice and health information were reorganized, shortened, and rewritten to make it easy for people to read. <sup>1 2 3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> What is plain language? Available at <https://www.plainlanguage.gov/about/definitions/>.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): What is health literacy? Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/learn/index.html>.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH): Health Literacy. Available at <https://www.nih.gov/institutes-nih/nih-office-director/office-communications-public-liaison/clear-communication/health-literacy>.

### *How are the ACATs organized?*

Your telehealth triage software vendor will determine how your ACAT handout's look and are organized.

Typically, the handouts have a similar organization style and are commonly divided into the following sections:

#### **Overview**

- This section includes information such as key points, symptoms, causes, and sometimes caution statements.
- The goal of this section is to provide the patient with an overall summary of their symptom(s) or condition.

#### **Care Advice**

- This section contains targeted care advice for each different symptom.
- If the topic leans more toward health information you will find more detailed information.

#### **Over-The-Counter Medicine**

- Here we list over-the-counter medicines that can be used to treat each different symptom or condition.
- The most common over-the-counter medicine warning information is also found within this section.

#### **Prevention**

- The prevention care advice here is only applicable to certain topics.
- For example, using eye protection to prevent eye injuries.

#### **When to Call Back or Seek Care**

- We outline when the patient should call back or seek care.
- In some cases, we have listed symptoms or changes in condition that would necessitate emergency care.

### *What is the reading level of the ACATs?*

The average Flesch-Kincaid reading-grade level is 5.06 and the average length is 2.51 pages.

Here is an example of the *Bee Sting* topic.

### Bee Sting

Adult Care Advice Topic

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#### Overview

Key Points

- Most stings are from honeybees or yellow jackets. Other types of bees that sting are bumble bees, hornets, and wasps.
- The stinger injects venom into the skin causing symptoms.
- The main symptoms are pain, swelling, itching, and redness at the sting site.

Types of Sting Reactions

There are 4 types of sting reactions.

- **Local reaction:** This is the most common reaction. Symptoms are pain, swelling, itching, and redness around the sting site.
- **Large local reaction:** Sometimes a local reaction can be larger, such as more than 4 inches (10 cm). Swelling may increase in size for 24 to 48 hours.
- **Toxic reaction:** A toxic reaction may occur if you are stung multiple times at once. Symptoms are lightheadedness, vomiting, and diarrhea. Medical treatment is needed for this type of reaction.
- **Anaphylactic reaction:** This is a severe, life-threatening allergic reaction to the sting. This happens mainly during the first 2 hours after the sting. Emergency medical treatment is needed for this type of reaction.

When Can I Expect the Bee Sting to Get Better?

- **Pain:** Severe pain or burning at the site lasts about 1 to 2 hours. The pain usually starts to decrease after 2 hours. Itching can follow the pain.
- **Redness and swelling:** Redness and swelling can increase for 24 hours after the sting. This is normal. The redness can last up to 3 days. Swelling can last up to 7 days.
- Infections from stings are uncommon.

#### Care Advice

1. **Treating a Local Reaction to Sting**
  - A cold pack can help reduce pain and swelling.
  - For pain, you can take acetaminophen, ibuprofen, or naproxen. See the over-the-counter (OTC) medicine section.
  - For itching, you can try an antihistamine medicine. See the OTC medicine section.
  - Here is some other care advice that should help.
2. **Remove the Stinger if You Can See It**

In many cases there will not be a stinger. Only bees have stingers that stay in the skin. Wasps, yellow jackets, and hornets have stingers that do not detach.

  - The stinger looks like a tiny black dot in the center of the sting.
  - You can try to grab the stinger with your fingers.

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- You can scrape it out with a credit card or your fingernail.
- You can also try to place a piece of scotch tape over the stinger and pull it off.
- If a small part of the stinger remains, leave it alone. It will come out on its own when your skin sheds.

3. **Cold Pack for Local Sting Reactions**
  - Apply a cold pack or ice wrapped in a washcloth to the site for 10 to 20 minutes. Cold helps with pain and itching.
  - You may repeat this as needed to help relieve symptoms.
  - Caution: Do NOT apply ice directly to the skin.
4. **Avoid Picking**
  - Avoid scratching and picking sores or bites.
  - This can cause a skin infection and delay healing.
5. **Apply Antibiotic Ointment to a Crusted or Scabbed Sting**

Sometimes a crusted sore or scab can develop at the sting site. The scab may drain a tiny amount of pus.

  - Wash the sore 2 to 3 times a day with soap and warm water.
  - If there is a scab, gently remove it. You may need to soak the scab off. Place a warm wet washcloth (or gauze) on the sore for 10 minutes.
  - Put a small amount of over-the-counter antibiotic ointment on the area. Do this 3 times a day. Examples are bacitracin ointment (in U.S.) or Polysporin ointment (in Canada) or one that you already have.
  - Cover the area with a clean gauze or an adhesive bandage (such as a Band-Aid).

#### Over-The-Counter Medicines

Over-The-Counter (OTC) Pain Medicines

- For pain, you can take acetaminophen (Tylenol or generic brand), ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, or generic brand), or naproxen (Aleve or generic brand).
- Acetaminophen is a safer choice than ibuprofen and naproxen in people over age 65 years.
- **Acetaminophen Caution:** Acetaminophen is in many OTC and prescription medicines. It might be in more than one medicine that you are taking. Be careful not to take too much because it can hurt your liver. Do NOT take acetaminophen if you have liver disease.
- **Ibuprofen and Naproxen Caution:** Do NOT take ibuprofen or naproxen if you have stomach problems, kidney disease, or are pregnant. Do NOT take these medicines if a doctor (or NP/PA) has told you to avoid anti-inflammatory medicine.

Before taking any medicine, read and follow the package instructions and warnings.

Over-The-Counter Antihistamine Medicines

Antihistamines are medicines used to treat skin itching.

- Cetirizine (Zyrtec, Zyrtec), fexofenadine (Allegra), and loratadine (Alavert, Claritin) are long-acting antihistamines. They are less likely to make you feel sleepy.
- Diphenhydramine (Benadryl) is a short-acting antihistamine. It can make you sleepy. You can take this medicine at bedtime for itching that keeps you awake at night.
- Caution: Some antihistamine medicines can make you sleepy. Do NOT drink alcohol, drive or operate dangerous

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Thank you for your hard work, dedication, commitment to excellence, and your ongoing efforts to deliver the best care to telehealth patients.

Warm regards,

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