



The Common Cold

What causes a cold?

Several types of viruses that are present in your nose and throat cause colds. You are more likely to get colds or other infections when you are "run-down" and don't get enough sleep, eat poorly, and/or spend time with people who have colds. These conditions can reduce your resistance to infection, making it more likely for you to get sick. Most people get colds by physical contact, or inhaling the infected droplets from a cough or sneeze. It is estimated that the average college student will have up to four colds per year.

What are the symptoms?

The common cold usually includes some combination of the following symptoms: sneezing, sore throat, runny nose, coughing, stuffy or congested nose, hoarseness, swollen glands, muscles aches and fever.

What treatments are available?

Presently, there is no known cure for colds. Penicillin and other antibiotics are of no value in the treatment of a viral illness. Once the virus has run its course, the body's own immune system will generally cure itself in one to two weeks.

Although there are no medications available to cure colds, there are several nonprescription medications that will provide temporary relief from cold symptoms. **Ask your medical provider or pharmacist about what nonprescription medicine would be the most appropriate for you.** Some common over the counter medications are:

FOR GENERAL DISCOMFORT, HEADACHES, AND FEVER

Aspirin/Ibuprofen - Examples: Bayer and Bufferin or Motrin and Advil.

Ten grains of aspirin or ibuprofen (two regular tablets) every 4-6 hours will reduce discomfort of sore throat, headache, or body ache and will also reduce fever. Aspirin should be taken with a full glass of water or with food to prevent stomach upset.

Acetaminophen/Ibuprofen - Example: Tylenol, Motrin, or Advil

This can be used as a substitute for those who cannot tolerate aspirin.

FOR CONGESTION AND RUNNY NOSE

Decongestants - Example: Sudafed, Afrinol and Afrin nasal spray

These help to relieve sinus stuffiness and pressure sensation in the ears by reducing the size of swollen mucous membranes. Caution should be observed when using decongestants because nasal sprays or drops can cause dependency. These items should be used sparingly. Oral decongestants may have side effects of nervousness or insomnia that should be a sign to reduce dosage or discontinue use entirely.

Antihistamines - Example: chlorpheniramine (Chlor-Trimeton)

These help to dry up a runny nose. Some caution should be taken when using antihistamines because they may cause drowsiness.

Combined Antihistamines/Decongestants - Example: Drixoral and Actifed

In combination they help relieve both runny and stuffy nasal symptoms.

COUGH

Cough Expectorant or Suppressant - Example: Robitussin-DM and Delsym

These reduce sensitivity to cough reflex and decrease coughing. A cough suppressant may be helpful for dry hacking cough or to decrease coughing at night so you can sleep.

SORE THROAT

Throat Sprays and Lozenges - Example: Chloraseptic or Cepacol

These temporarily relieve sore throats, but some contain anesthetics to which some people are allergic. Use them according to the directions on the package. You can make an inexpensive, soothing gargle with ¼ tsp. of salt in a glass of warm water. Use this as often as you like.

Are there alternative treatments?

Zinc lozenges and Echinacea have been introduced as possible cold remedies in recent years. Although acceptance of these treatments has grown, clinical trials have failed to provide concrete evidence that either of these items is effective in eliminating or preventing colds.

Do cold symptoms follow a pattern?

Cold symptoms do follow a pattern. Symptoms begin to appear from 1-3 days after the initial infection. However, the cold virus may be passed on to other individuals even before the infected person begins to experience symptoms. This is one reason why colds are hard to prevent. Usually the first indication of an infection is scratchiness or a tickling feeling in the throat. Within a few hours, a person may experience a stuffy nose, sneezing, and other forms of discomfort and illness. A cold is usually fully developed within 48 hours after the initial infection, and may last from 4-14 days.

Do complications occur from colds?

Health complications arising from colds are rare, but sometimes occur. These can occur by aggravating pre-existing respiratory conditions such as asthma, bronchitis, pneumonia, ear or sinus infections.

What can be done to keep from getting a cold?

Plenty of sleep, a healthy diet, and limited contact with infected individuals will greatly decrease a person's chances of getting a cold. Washing hands more frequently, especially after contact with ill individuals, may lower the chance of infection, as touching your nose or eyes easily passes cold viruses.

Contrary to common belief, there is no scientific evidence that avoiding cold temperatures or drafts or taking large quantities vitamin C will aid in preventing colds. Vitamin C intake has long been recognized a preventative measure for colds. Despite this longstanding recognition, there is presently no conclusive evidence that taking vitamin C supplements will prevent colds. One study has suggested that people taking vitamin C on a daily basis experience milder cold symptoms than those who do not. However, experts are reluctant to recommend taking single-nutrient supplements to avoid cold and flu viruses. People who suffer from kidney disease should avoid taking vitamin C supplements. Overall, most experts recommend that people meet their daily vitamin and mineral requirements by eating a well balanced diet.

What can be done for a cold?

1. Drink a lot of liquids; particularly warm ones.
2. Get plenty of rest, at least 8-10 hours of sleep each night.
3. Inhale light steam. This helps soothe a dry and/or raw throat. It might also help to stand in a hot steamy shower or draping a towel over one's head and holding it over a sink of steaming water. If possible, a person can use a "cold steam" vaporizer to add moisture to a room.

For More Information:

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