

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE COMMON COLD



What is a cold? The common cold, also known as an upper respiratory infection (URI), can be caused by any of the 200+ viruses. These viruses attack and multiply in the cells that line the nose and throat. Some cold viruses attach to the cells in your lower respiratory tract and cause coughs as well as runny noses and sore throats. A cold usually lasts about one or two weeks and there is no cure. However, symptomatic treatment may help you feel better.

What are the symptoms? The aches and pains that we usually call a cold are really signs that the body is fighting the infection. These signs and symptoms include:

- Scratchy or sore throat
- Sneezing, runny or stuffy nose
- Fevers (<102° and less than 4 days)
- Nasal discharge (thick, opaque or discolored discharge is part of the cold unless it lasts more than 10-14 days)
- Tearing – watery eyes
- Full feeling in the ears or popping
- Mild facial pressure
- Cough (dry or with clear or white mucus)
- General “tired” feeling or body aches
- Laryngitis / hoarse voice
- Tender or swollen neck glands

When should I see a health care provider? All of the methods to alleviate the symptoms of a cold are over-the-counter and can be done by you at home (see below for specific recommendations). However, if you are having any of the following symptoms please call the health center at 619-260-4595 or contact your personal medical provider:

- ✓ A high (>102^o) fever or fever that lasts over 4 days
- ✓ A history of asthma or prior hospitalization for breathing problems
- ✓ Symptoms longer than 7 days and are getting worse
- ✓ Facial or upper teeth pain
- ✓ Chest tightness, wheeze, shortness of breath or chest pain
- ✓ Ear pain or profound hearing loss
- ✓ Severe headache
- ✓ Neck stiffness
- ✓ Severe sore throat or difficulty swallowing
- ✓ Symptoms accompanied by a rash
- ✓ A large amount of sputum

What can I do to make myself feel better? Below are recommendations categorized by symptoms.

Runny or stuffy nose, post-nasal drip, Facial fullness, ear fullness or popping

1. Take an oral **decongestant** (such as pseudoephedrine), or use a decongestant nasal spray (containing phenylephrine). Do not use a decongestant nasal spray for more than 3 days in a row.
2. Take an **expectorant or mucus-thinning agent or cough medicine** containing guaifenesin.
3. Allergy symptoms, especially runny nose and sneezing, often respond to **anti-histamines**. The value of antihistamines in treating cold symptoms is under debate.
4. **Saline nasal sprays** keep nasal tissue moist so the tissues can filter the air, but will not cause tissues in the nose to swell. This is also used to flush out your sinus passages and prevent sinus infection.

Cough or Chest Congestion

1. **Water and other liquids** are probably the best cough syrups. They help soothe the throat and moisten and thin mucus so it can be coughed up more easily.
2. Take an **expectorant or mucus-thinning agent or cough medicine** containing guaifenesin to make it easier to cough mucus up.
3. **Suppressants** (such as dextro-methorphan) control or suppress the cough reflex and work best for a dry, hacking cough that keeps you awake. Codeine is a strong prescription cough-suppressant. Don't suppress a productive cough too much, unless it is keeping you from getting enough rest.

Sore Throat

1. **Gargle with warm salt water** (1 tsp of salt in 8 ounces of water) to reduce swelling and discomfort.
2. **Drink more fluids to soothe your sore throat.** Honey and lemon in hot water or in weak tea may help.
3. **Throat lozenges, cough drops, and sore throat sprays** are safe, effective, and have a local anesthetic to soothe pain.

Laryngitis

1. **Rest your voice.** Talk as little as possible. Don't shout or whisper, and avoid clearing your throat. Medication does little to speed recovery.

Fever (< 100^o for <5 days; or <101^o for < 3 days) headache, achiness

1. **Acetaminophen, aspirin or ibuprofen will relieve pain and reduce fever.** Do not give aspirin to anyone younger than 20.

Various medications can cause problems for people who have certain health problems or may interact with some drugs. Read the package carefully or ask a health professional to help you choose one.

What else can I do?

- ❖ Do get plenty of rest and eat well
- ❖ Drink 8-12 glasses of liquids a day. Hot liquids soothe the throat and help loosen secretions, and relieve nasal congestion. Don't drink beverages containing caffeine or alcohol that can lead to dehydration.
- ❖ Don't treat your cold with an antibiotic. Antibiotics combat bacterial, not viral infections. An antibiotic is not only a waste of money, but may expose you unnecessarily to the potential side-effects of these medications, or make them ineffective later.
- ❖ Don't smoke, and avoid second hand smoke. Smoking will further irritate your nasal passages and increase your risk of bacterial infections.
- ❖ Wash your hands frequently to make you less contagious to your friends.
- ❖ Do inhale warm, moist air to soothe inflamed mucous membranes. To do this, take hot showers, or use a cool-mist humidifier.
- ❖ Large doses of vitamin C, zinc, and Echinacea has NOT been proven to be beneficial.