

Colds =upper respiratory infections (URIs)

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What is a cold and what causes it? A cold is an infection of the nose and upper airways caused by a virus. Many different viruses can cause a cold.

What are the symptoms of a cold?

- The common symptoms are a blocked (congested) nose, a runny nose, and sneezing. At first there is a clear discharge (mucus) from the nose. This often becomes thick and yellow/green after 2-3 days. It may be difficult to sleep due to a blocked nose. You may feel generally unwell and tired, and you may develop a fever.
- Often you will experience there a sore throat, drainage of mucus down the back of your throat, hoarseness and a cough.
- It is common to have sinus pain and pressure (pain in your forehead, cheeks and on either side of your nose).
- A build up of mucus behind the eardrums may cause dulled hearing or mild earache.
- The symptoms, particularly cough, tend to be worse in smokers and it may take 2-3 weeks after other symptoms have gone for a cough to clear completely.
- To prevent spreading your cold to others it's important that you wash your hands regularly and cover you mouth/nose when you cough or sneeze.

What are the treatments for a cold? What are the treatments for a cold? There is no magic cure for the common cold! The symptoms tend to be worse in the first 2-5 days, and then usually ease gradually over the next few days. Sometimes the symptoms take up to two weeks to clear fully. Antibiotics do not kill viruses, so are of no use for colds. Taking an antibiotic now carries considerable risk of side effects and future resistance to antibiotics and will not speed up your recovery or prevent your cold from getting worse. Treatment aims at easing your symptoms whilst your immune system clears the virus. Some useful treatments are:

- **Ibuprofen (Advil; Motrin)** and/or **acetaminophen (Tylenol)** will ease fever, sore throat, headache and body aches and pains. **Ibuprofen (Advil/Motrin)** comes in 200mg tablets/capsules and you can take 3 of them (=600mg) every 6 hours as needed, which amounts to up to 4 times a day. An alternative to ibuprofen (*Advil; Motrin*) is **naproxen sodium (Aleve)** 220 mg tablets. The adult dose is 2 tablets (=440mg) twice a day as needed, with roughly 12 hours between each dose. **Acetaminophen (Tylenol)** comes in two strengths – regular strength = 325mg and you can safely take 2 tablets (=650mg) every 4 hours as needed - which is equivalent to up to 6 times a day. Extra Strength acetaminophen (*Tylenol*) is a 500mg tablet and you can safely take 2 tablets (=1,000mg) every 6 hours as needed which amounts to up to 4 times a day.
- **Over the counter lozenges (e.g. Sucrets Extra Strength or Cepacol)** and warm salt water gargles can help for the symptoms of a sore throat.
- **For a runny nose, nasal or sinus congestion - Phenylephrine (Sudafed PE)** is an inexpensive **decongestant** that you can buy over the counter at most stores/pharmacies. The recommended dose is 1 tablet (10mg) every 4 hours as needed. An alternative is a **decongestant/antihistamine combination** such as **chlorpheniramine/phenylephrine 4 mg/10 mg (Actifed)** – 1 tablet every 4-6 hours as needed (**can be sedating**).
- **For a cough – Dextromethorphan** (e.g. *Benylin, Vick's*) is a useful cough suppressant and comes in various forms:
 - Capsules 30 mg – 1 every 6-8 hours as needed
 - Liquid – comes in a 10 mg/5 ml; 12.5 mg/5ml and 15 mg/5ml – Adult dose 10 – 30 mg every 4-6 hours as needed
 - Sustained action liquid 30 mg/5ml (*De/sym*) – the dose is 10ml or 2 teaspoons every 12 hours (= twice a day, morning and evening) as needed.
- **Have lots to drink.** A fever may cause you to lose extra body fluid by sweating. This may lead to mild dehydration which can make you feel more tired, and may cause a headache. So, drink plenty. Hot drinks are often soothing too.
- You can buy many other '**cold-flu remedies**' at stores and pharmacies. There is little evidence that they do much good but some people find them useful.

A note of caution: 'Cold and Flu Remedies' often contain several ingredients. Some may make you drowsy. This may be welcome at bedtime if you have difficulty sleeping with a cold. However, do not drive if you are drowsy. Some contain acetaminophen (*Tylenol*), so be careful not to take more than the maximum safe dose of acetaminophen (*Tylenol*) (4,000 mg in a 24 hour period) if you are already taking acetaminophen (*Tylenol*) tablets. Likewise some contain ibuprofen (*Advil/Motrin*) and you should be careful not to exceed a total of 2,400mg of ibuprofen a day.

Are there any possible complications from a cold? Most colds do not cause complications. A cold may trigger coughing, wheezing and shortness of breath in people with asthma or other lung diseases. Sometimes the infection travels to the chest, sinuses, or ears. Bacteria may thrive in the mucus so some people develop a 'secondary' bacterial infection of the chest, ears or sinuses. Consult a doctor if symptoms do not start to ease within a few days (5-7 days), or if you suspect that a complication is developing.