

Adult Self-Care for Colds



Colds are caused by viruses, so they can't be treated with antibiotics. There is no cure for the common cold, but you can ease symptoms and support your body's efforts to heal itself. No matter which symptoms you have, be sure to:

- Drink plenty of fluids (water or clear soup), and stay away from drinks with caffeine or too much sugar
- Don't smoke or drink alcohol
- Get plenty of rest
- Stay away from secondhand smoke
- Prevent the spread of cold viruses. Wash your hands often with soap and clean, running water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water aren't available, you can use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Try not to touch your face with unwashed hands. Prevent close contact with others. And stay at home while you are sick.



Understand a fever

- Take your temperature several times a day. If your fever is 100.4° F (38°C) or higher for more than 1 day, call your healthcare provider.
- Relax, lie down. Go to bed if you want. Just get off your feet and rest. Also drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.
- Take acetaminophen or a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen.

Treating a stuffy nose

- Breathe steam or heated humidified air to open blocked nasal passages. Stand in a hot shower or use a vaporizer. Be careful not to get burned by the steam.
- Saline nasal sprays and decongestant tablets or nasal sprays help open a stuffy nose. Antihistamines may also help. But be cautious of the side effects. These include drowsiness and drying of the eyes, nose, and mouth.

Soothe a sore throat and cough

- Gargle every 2 hours with 1/4 teaspoon of salt dissolved in 1/2 cup of warm water. Suck on throat lozenges and cough drops to soothe your throat.
- Cough medicines are available. But it's not clear how well they work.
- Take acetaminophen or an NSAID, such as ibuprofen, to ease throat pain. Follow package directions on how much to use and how often to take the medicine.

Ease digestive problems

- Put fluids back into your body. Take frequent sips of clear liquids, such as water or broth. Stay away from drinks that have a lot of sugar in them. These include juices and sodas. These can make diarrhea worse. Older children and adults can drink sports drinks.
- As your appetite returns, you can go back to your normal diet. Ask your healthcare provider if there are any foods you shouldn't have.

When to call your healthcare provider

When you first notice symptoms, ask your provider if you should take any prescription medicines. Antibiotics should not be taken for colds or flu. Also call your provider if you have any of these symptoms:

- You don't feel better after 7 days
- Belly pain or vomiting
- Symptoms get worse, especially after a period of improvement
- Fever of 100.4° F (38°C) or higher, or fever that doesn't go down with medicine, or as advised by your provider
- Dizziness or weakness
- Slight shortness of breath or wheezing
- Spotted, red, or very sore throat
- Signs of dehydration:
 - Extreme thirst
 - Dark urine
 - Not peeing often
 - Dry mouth

When to call 911

Call **911** right away if any of these occur:

- Chest pain
- Coughing up blood
- Fast or irregular heartbeat

- Severe trouble breathing
- Sudden confusion, fainting, or loss of consciousness

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