1. What's the difference between a cold and the flu?

These illnesses are caused by different viruses. They have similar symptoms, so it can be hard to tell them apart. In general, cold symptoms are much milder than flu symptoms.

1. What are the common symptoms of a cold:

Sore throat

Stuffy nose

Runny nose

Cough

Mild fever

The flu, on the other hand, often causes higher fever, chills, body aches, and fatigue.

1. Why isn't there a cold vaccine?

The cold can be caused by nearly 250 different viruses. It's just too hard for scientists to make a vaccine that protects you against all of them.

Also, from a medical point of view, there's less need to create a vaccine for colds than other illnesses. Although you feel awful when you have one, they generally come and go without any serious complications. You're miserable for a few days, then it's over.

1. Could my cold symptoms actually be allergies?

It's possible, if you're sniffling but not achy or feverish.

Also, if your symptoms last longer than 2 weeks, and you also have red, itchy eyes, it might be allergies.

But it's often hard to tell the difference because people with allergies and asthma are more likely to get colds. They may already have inflamed and irritated lungs, so they're less able to fight off a virus.

1. What's the best treatment for a cold?

The most important thing you can do is drink a lot of fluids to keep your body hydrated. This will help prevent another infection from setting in.

Avoid drinks with caffeine like coffee, tea, and colas. They may rob your body of fluids. When it comes to food, follow your appetite. If you're not really hungry, try simple things like white rice or broth.

Chicken soup is comforting, plus the steam helps break up nasal congestion. Ginger seems to settle an upset stomach. A hot toddy may help you sleep, but be careful about drinking alcohol if you also take cold remedies.

1. How effective are natural remedies like zinc?

There are mixed reviews on zinc. Some studies show that zinc nasal sprays can help reduce how long your cold lasts and make your symptoms less severe.

The theory? Zinc sprays may coat the cold virus and prevent it from attaching to cells in your nose, where they enter your body.

Other studies show that zinc isn't helpful. And because of the risk of a loss of smell, many experts recommend that you avoid zinc nasal sprays completely.

To prevent colds the natural way, it's best to make sure you've got a well-nourished immune system, your body's defense against germs.

1. How effective are natural remedies like Echinacea?

Recent studies on echinacea show that it isn't helpful in preventing colds. But in one study, 120 people with cold-like symptoms took 20 drops of echinacea every 2 hours for 10 days and had briefer colds than others.

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1. How effective are natural remedies like vitamin C?

A recent look at 65 years of studies found limited benefit of Vitamin C. The researchers saw no evidence that it prevents colds. But they did find signs that your colds might not last as long if you take vitamin C. One large study found that people who took a megadose -- 8 grams on the first day they got sick -- shortened the length of their colds.

To prevent colds the natural way, it's best to make sure you've got a well-nourished immune system, your body's defense against germs.

1. How to promote a well-nourished immune system?

To prevent colds the natural way, it's best to make sure you've got a well-nourished immune system, your body's defense against germs. Dark-green foods like spinach are loaded with vitamins A and C. Salmon is a great source of omega-3 fatty acids, which fight inflammation. Low-fat yogurt may help activate the immune system.

Regular exercise also boosts the immune system. People who do it may still catch a virus, but their symptoms aren't as bad, and they may recover more quickly.

1. Should I get an antibiotic?

Antibiotics fight bacteria, but that won't help your cold, which is caused by a virus.

But your doctor may prescribe an antibiotic if you have some complications. For instance, if your sinuses are blocked and can't drain properly, you can get inflammation and a bacterial infection. The symptoms may be a runny or stuffy nose, pain and pressure in your face, and a headache.

Also, you can sometimes get an ear infection after a cold, and you might need antibiotics to treat it. Symptoms include ear pain, fever, or a feeling of fullness in the ears.

1. Should I stay at home if I have a cold?

You're contagious for the first few days of your cold, so it's best to stay home then. You need to be careful about coughing and sneezing around other people. Also, you will get better quicker if you get some rest.

1. How can I prevent a cold?

Your best approach? Wash your hands. Both the flu and colds are passed around the same way. Someone sneezes or coughs, and tiny droplets with a virus are sprayed onto any nearby surface -- including you!

If people cough or sneeze into their hands without a tissue, they can spread the virus to every surface they touch. If you touch that same spot, you'll pick it up. If you touch your eyes, nose, or mouth, you've just infected yourself.

1. How to prevent the spread of cold and flu viruses:

Wash your hands frequently with soap and water. If you don't have that nearby, use an alcohol-based gel.

Cough and sneeze into a tissue.

No tissue? When you cough, turn your head away from others.

If you have a sudden sneeze, bend your arm and sneeze into it.

Don't touch your eyes, nose, or mouth.

Wash any shared surfaces, like phones and keyboards, frequently. Viruses can live on surfaces for several hours.

Stay away from crowds during cold and flu season.

1. Can you catch a cold from cold air?

This is one of the most persistent myths about colds. The only way you get sick is when you come into contact with a virus.

Cold air may irritate a condition you already have, like asthma, which could make your body more receptive to a cold virus. But you still need to come in contact with the virus.

1. Why does my child always seem to have a cold?

Kids are incredibly good at passing around a virus. They naturally breathe out more highly concentrated virus droplets than adults do.

As every parent knows, children are very active, always in each other's faces. And of course, they may not wash their hands as often or as well as grown-ups.