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Cold and Cough Medicines

What are cold and cough medicines?

Cold and cough medicines can help relieve symptoms of a **common cold** [<https://medlineplus.gov/commoncold.html>] . The symptoms of a cold can include a sore throat, stuffy or runny nose, sneezing, and **coughing** [<https://medlineplus.gov/cough.html>] .

You don't usually need to treat a cold or the cough that it causes. You can't cure a cold, and antibiotics won't help you get better. But sometimes the symptoms can keep you awake or cause a lot of discomfort. In that case, cold and cough medicines can sometimes be helpful.

What are the different types of cold and cough medicines?

There are lots of different cold and cough medicines, and they do different things:

- Nasal decongestants - unclog a stuffy nose
- Cough suppressants - quiet a cough
- Expectorants - loosen mucus in your lungs so you can cough it up
- Antihistamines - stop runny noses and sneezing
- Pain relievers [<https://medlineplus.gov/painrelievers.html>] - ease fever, headaches, and minor aches and pains

What do I need to know about taking cold and cough medicines?

Before taking these medicines, read the labels and follow the instructions carefully. Many cold and cough medicines contain the same active ingredients. For example, some of them include pain relievers. If you are taking these medicines and are also taking a separate pain reliever, you could be getting a dangerous amount of the pain reliever.

Do not give cold or cough medicines to children under two, and don't give aspirin to children.

What else can I do to feel better for a cold or cough?

If you decide that you don't want to take cold and cough medicines, there are other ways to feel better:

- Drink lots of fluids
- Get plenty of rest
- Use a cool mist humidifier
- Use saline nose drops or sprays
- Use nasal suctioning with a bulb syringe, which can be very helpful in children under a year old

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Start Here


- Cold Remedies: What Works, What Doesn't, What Can't Hurt [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/common-cold/in-depth/cold-remedies/ART-20046403?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/common-cold/in-depth/cold-remedies/art-20046403?p=1>]

Cough Medicine: Understanding Your OTC Options [<https://familydoctor.org/cough-medicine-understanding-your-otc-options/?adfree=true>] (American Academy of Family Physicians)


Also in Spanish [<https://es.familydoctor.org/compreension-de-medicamentos-de-venta-libre-contr-la-tos/?adfree=true>]

- Decongestants: OTC Relief for Congestion [<https://familydoctor.org/decongestants-otc-relief-for-congestion/?adfree=true>] (American Academy of Family Physicians)
Also in Spanish [<https://es.familydoctor.org/descongestionantes-alivio-para-la-congestion-de-venta-libre/?adfree=true>]


Treatments and Therapies

- 5 Tips: Natural Products for the Flu and Colds: What Does the Science Say? [<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/tips/tips-natural-products-for-the-flu-and-colds-what-does-the-science-say>]  (National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health)



Related Issues

- Acetaminophen Level [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/acetaminophen-level/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/nivel-de-acetaminofen/>]
- Don't Overuse Acetaminophen [<https://www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/dont-overuse-acetaminophen>] (Food and Drug Administration)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.fda.gov/consumers/articulos-para-el-consumidor-en-espanol/no-abuse-del-acetaminofen>]
- High Blood Pressure and Cold Remedies: Which Are Safe? [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/high-blood-pressure/expert-answers/high-blood-pressure/FAQ-20058281?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/high-blood-pressure/expert-answers/high-blood-pressure/faq-20058281?p=1>]

Specifics

- Echinacea [<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/echinacea>]  (National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health)
- Echinacea: What Should I Know about It? [<https://familydoctor.org/echinacea-what-should-i-know-about-it/?adfree=true>] (American Academy of Family Physicians)
Also in Spanish [<https://es.familydoctor.org/equinacea-que-debo-saber-sobre-esto/?adfree=true>]
- Zinc for Colds: The Final Word? [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/common-cold/expert-answers/zinc-for-colds/FAQ-20057769?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/common-cold/expert-answers/zinc-for-colds/faq-20057769?p=1>]

Clinical Trials

- ClinicalTrials.gov: Antitussive Agents [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Antitussive+Agents%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)
- ClinicalTrials.gov: Histamine Antagonists [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Histamine+Antagonists%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)

Journal Articles

References and abstracts from MEDLINE/PubMed (National Library of Medicine)

- Article: Cough medicine prescriptions for children by physician specialty and healthcare sector:... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40624396>]
- Article: A Pharmacological Study of Shirisharishta and Its Antihistaminic Effects in Guinea... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40619249>]
- Article: Metabolomic insights into variable antihistamine responses in allergic rhinitis: unveiling biomarkers... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40599789>]
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Find an Expert

- Food and Drug Administration [<https://www.fda.gov/>]

Children

- Cough and Cold Medicine Abuse (For Parents) [<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/cough-cold-medicine-abuse.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/parents/cough-cold-medicine-abuse.html>]
- Coughs and Colds: Medicines or Home Remedies? [<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/chest-lungs/Pages/Coughs-and-Colds-Medicines-or-Home-Remedies.aspx>] (American Academy of Pediatrics)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.healthychildren.org/spanish/health-issues/conditions/chest-lungs/paginas/coughs-and-colds-medicines-or-home-remedies.aspx>]
- Should You Give Kids Medicine for Coughs and Colds? [<https://www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/should-you-give-kids-medicine-coughs-and-colds>] (Food and Drug Administration)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.fda.gov/consumers/articulos-para-el-consumidor-en-espanol/cuando-dar-medicina-para-la-tos-y-el-resfriado-los-ninos>]



MEDICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

- Brompheniramine overdose [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002601.htm>]
- Cold medicines and children [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000942.htm>]
- Contac overdose [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002616.htm>]
- Dextromethorphan overdose [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002628.htm>]
- Dimenhydrinate overdose [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002634.htm>]
- Diphenhydramine overdose [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002636.htm>]
- Hydroxyzine overdose [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002654.htm>]
- Pheniramine overdose [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002529.htm>]

Related Health Topics

- Common Cold [<https://medlineplus.gov/commoncold.html>]
- Cough [<https://medlineplus.gov/cough.html>]

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