

COLD, COMMON



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

A contagious viral infection of the upper-respiratory tract. This includes the nose, throat, and sinuses. A cold also affects the ears and lungs. Colds are the most common disease in the world.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Stuffy or runny nose. Nasal discharge may be watery at first, becoming thick and yellow.
- Throat feels scratchy or sore.
- Coughing and sneezing.
- Loss of voice.
- Mild headache.
- Fatigue.
- Low-grade fever.
- Watering eyes.
- Cold symptoms start slowly. Flu symptoms are more sudden and include higher fever, major aches, chills, sweats, weakness, possible severe sore throat, cough, and chest discomfort.

CAUSES

Any of at least 100 viruses. Virus particles spread through the air or from person-to-person contact. Colds are often spread with hand-shaking.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Winter (colds are most frequent in cold weather).
- Children attending school or daycare.
- Household member who has a cold.
- Crowded or unclean living conditions.
- Stress, fatigue, and allergies.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- To prevent spreading a cold to others, avoid contact if possible during the contagious phase (first 2 to 4 days).
- Wash hands often, especially after blowing your nose or before handling food.
- Avoid crowded places when possible, especially during the winter.
- Eat a well-balanced, healthy diet. Include plenty of citrus fruits and other sources of vitamin C.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Recovery in 7 to 14 days.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Bacterial infections of the ears, throat, sinuses, or lungs.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Self-care and time is usually all that is needed for a cold. There is no cure for a cold. There are many remedies for cold symptoms. They include nonprescription

cold preparations, getting extra rest, drinking plenty of fluids, and others that may be suggested by friends and family members. One or more of these may help you feel better until the body's defenses fight off the germs.

- To help relieve nasal congestion, use salt-water drops (1/2 teaspoon of salt to 1 cup of warm water). Put 2 or 3 drops of salt solution into each nostril.
- Don't smoke. It can further irritate the nasal passages.
- For a baby too young to blow his or her nose, use an infant nasal aspirator. If mucus is thick and sticky, loosen it by putting 2 or 3 drops of salt solution (see above) into each nostril. Don't insert cotton swabs into a child's nostrils.

MEDICATIONS

No drugs, including antibiotics, can cure the common cold. To help relieve symptoms, you may use nonprescription drugs, such as acetaminophen, decongestants, nose drops or sprays, cough remedies, and throat lozenges. It is best to get a product that works for one symptom, such as a runny nose, rather than a multi-symptom product. If you take other drugs, talk to your health care provider or pharmacist about possible drug interactions.

ACTIVITY

Bed rest is not needed. Do reduce activity and exercise.

DIET

Regular diet. Drink extra fluids, including water, fruit juice, tea, and carbonated drinks.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You have increased throat pain, or white or yellow spots on the tonsils or other parts of the throat.
- You have long coughing episodes. Your cough produces thick, yellow-green or gray sputum. You have a cough that lasts longer than 10 days.
- A fever lasts several days, or is over 101°F (38.3°C).
- You have chills, chest pain, or shortness of breath.
- You develop a painful earache or severe headache.
- You develop a skin rash or bruised skin.
- You feel pain in the teeth or over the sinuses.
- You develop enlarged, tender glands in the neck.
- Infant with a cold is unable to bottle-feed or breast-feed.

Special notes:

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