

Colds and Nasal Congestion

The common cold is a mild viral infection. Cold symptoms come on gradually and can include:

- blocked or runny nose
- sore throat
- headaches
- muscle aches
- coughs
- sneezing
- a raised temperature
- pressure in your ears and face
- loss of taste and smell
- symptoms are the same in adults and children, sometimes symptoms can last longer in children.

All of these symptoms can be treated at home, without the need to visit your GP or the need for antibiotics.

Antibiotics are ineffective for treating the common cold; they won't relieve your symptoms or speed up your recovery. Antibiotics are only effective against bacterial infections and colds are caused by viruses.

Managing your condition

Common colds are treatable with some simple measures. To help you get better more quickly:

- **Rest and sleep**
- **Keep warm**
- **Drink plenty of water** (fruit juice or squash mixed with water is OK) to [avoid dehydration](#)
- **Diet and fluids** - Eat healthily, including at least five portions of fruit and vegetables every day.
- **Over the counter medicines** - Paracetamol, ibuprofen or aspirin can help reduce the symptoms of a cold. Avoid giving aspirin to children under the age of 16 and follow the manufacturer's instructions. Talk to your pharmacist about supplements that may help ease your symptoms

How can I avoid triggers/ suggested lifestyle changes

The best ways to avoid catching a cold are:

- Washing your hands with warm water and soap
- Not sharing towels or household items (like cups) with someone who has a cold
- Not touching your eyes or nose in case you've come into contact with the virus – it can infect the body this way
- Staying fit and healthy

There's little evidence that supplements (such as vitamin C, zinc, echinacea or garlic) prevent colds or speed up recovery.

The flu vaccine helps prevent the flu but not colds.

How do I treat?

You can buy cough and cold medicines from pharmacies or supermarkets. Below is a list of symptoms and possible over the counter treatments, Speak to your pharmacist for advice if you're not sure which type of medicine is best for you and your symptoms:

- **Blocked or runny nose** – you can relieve using decongestant sprays or tablets or inhalation of steam
- **Headaches, muscle aches, a raised temperature** - ease aches or lower a temperature with painkillers like paracetamol and ibuprofen
- **Sore throat** – Use pain killers to relieve symptoms. There is not enough good quality evidence to recommend non-prescription gargles, lozenges and throat sprays, however you may still find them helpful

- **Coughs** – Stay hydrated, try simple home remedies, such as ‘honey and lemon’ drinks. There is little evidence to say whether over the counter medicines are effective for relieving cough symptoms. You may feel you get some benefit from over the counter preparations, speak to your pharmacist for advice

Be careful not to use cough and cold medicines if you’re taking paracetamol and ibuprofen tablets as it’s easy to take more than the recommended dose. Decongestant nasal sprays shouldn’t be used for more than a week at a time because using them for too long can make your stuffiness worse.

Some are not suitable for children; babies and pregnant women, speak to your pharmacist for advice.

How to avoid spreading a cold

Colds are caused by viruses and easily spread to other people. You’re infectious until all your symptoms have gone. This usually takes a week or two.

Colds are spread by germs from coughs and sneezes which can live on hands and surfaces for 24 hours. To reduce the risk of spreading a cold:

- Wash your hands often with warm water and soap
- Use tissues to trap germs when you cough or sneeze placing used tissues in a bin as quickly as possible

When should I seek advice?

Most colds are not serious and get better by themselves. Contact NHS 111 or your GP surgery for urgent advice if you notice one or more of the following:

- You develop a high temperature (above 39°C or 102.2°F), which can be a sign of a more serious type of infection
- You’re feeling confused or disorientated
- You notice a sharp pain in your chest
- You cough up blood-stained phlegm (thick mucus)
- You find it difficult to breathe
- You notice a marked swelling of the glands in your neck and/or armpits
- Your symptoms last longer than three weeks

More information is available at the following website

- NHS website - www.nhs.uk
- Or visit your local pharmacy for advice

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