

The Medicine Chest

If you want to do this:

Unclog stuffy nose

Loosen/cough up mucus

Relieve fever, headaches, minor aches and pains

Lessen flu severity

You should consider this:

Nasal decongestant, saline nasal drops

Expectorant

Analgesic (pain reliever) such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen

Antiviral medication (by prescription) — take as soon as possible

Note: Antibiotics kill bacteria and don't work against viruses. Your provider may prescribe an antibiotic if you develop a secondary bacterial infection such as sinusitis, bronchitis or earache.



Cold and Flu Myths and Facts

- **Cold weather doesn't cause colds.** There are more colds during winter months because it's easier for viruses to spread.
- **Vitamin C isn't proven to fight colds.** Large amounts of any vitamin have not been shown to stop or lessen severity of colds. But vitamin C-rich foods are beneficial as part of a healthy diet.
- **There's no scientific proof that echinacea prevents colds.** However, there is evidence that this herbal supplement can help treat colds, lessening severity of symptoms.
- **Zinc lozenges haven't been proven to "cure" colds.** But zinc in nasal spray or gel form may help reduce symptoms if taken at the first sign of a cold.
- **The flu shot can't give you the flu.** Any soreness or fever is the body's normal reaction to getting a needlestick and building immunity, and should be temporary.
- **Immunity to colds as you age does not extend to the flu.** That's because unlike cold viruses, the flu virus is always changing. That's why a flu shot every year is advised.

Cold or Flu? How to Tell

Cold and influenza (flu) are both respiratory illnesses but are caused by different viruses. It can be difficult to tell whether you have one or the other, but the following table showing differences may help.

	COLD	FLU
Typical symptoms:	Stuffy nose, sore throat, sneezing	Fatigue, fever, headache, major aches and pains, coughing
Symptom severity:	Milder	More intense
Seriousness:	Can lead to secondary infections such as sinusitis	Can lead to more serious problems, such as pneumonia and hospitalization
Duration:	2-14 days, usually 1 week	2-3 weeks, with a lot of fatigue

In general, flu symptoms are worse than cold symptoms. For example, with either you may have coughing, but if the cough is especially bad you may have the flu.

Determining whether you have a cold or the flu is important for knowing how to treat your symptoms and when to call your provider. The flu can be potentially fatal in people who are not well to begin with.

Knowing whether you have a cold or the flu also helps you know what to expect so you can plan around your illness. If you think it's flu, check with your provider as soon as possible as antiviral drugs are available that can help you ease your symptoms.

FAST FACTS ABOUT COLDS & FLU

A GUIDE TO PREVENTION & SELF CARE



Got a Cold?

The average adult gets two to four colds per year, and as you get older, you'll get even fewer. That's because over time, your body builds immunity to the more than 200 cold viruses that circulate in North America during the winter months.

That's the good news. The bad news is that there is still no cure for the common cold, a viral illness that attacks your respiratory tract, leading to stuffy or runny nose, sore throat, coughing, sneezing, headaches and occasionally fever. Still, there is much you can do to prevent colds and flu, a related and potentially more serious viral infection. This brochure tells you everything you need to know.



When to Get Help

Most colds go away on their own after a week to 10 days, and the flu usually subsides after several weeks. But check with your health care provider if you experience any of the following:

- High (above 102° F) or prolonged fever
- A cold that lasts for more than 10 days
- Trouble breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest
- Fainting or feeling like you are about to faint
- Confusion or disorientation
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Severe pain in your face or forehead
- Coughing up colored or bloody mucus
- Hoarseness, sore throat or a cough that won't go away

NOTE: In general, if symptoms get worse instead of better or you're at all concerned, seek medical help.

Rest Easy

If you're sick, get your rest. A well rested body is better able to build defenses. You'll also help prevent spreading your cold to others.

COLD STOPPERS

Colds are most often spread by hand-to-hand contact and by touching contaminated objects, or from droplets in the air via coughs or sneezes.

5 Steps to Preventing Colds

- 1. Wash your hands.** Most cold viruses can last up to three hours on the skin or infected objects. So wash your hands often during cold season, especially after shaking hands, visiting public places or handling shared items.
- 2. Don't touch your face.** You catch viruses when you touch your eyes, nose or mouth with your fingers (when your fingers have the germs on them).
- 3. Steer clear of colds.** Avoid close contact with people who have colds — as well as what they touch ... keyboards, doorknobs, utensils, food, drinks, toys, towels or telephones.
- 4. Keep it clean.** Scrub kitchen and bathroom countertops, especially if someone in your family has a cold.
- 5. Practice healthy habits.** Eat a balanced diet, get enough sleep and stay physically active to strengthen your body's natural defenses strong.



FLU FIGHTERS

Flu is most often spread through the air and is most often marked by headache, chest discomfort and extreme fatigue. Fortunately, a flu vaccine is available.

Get Your Flu Shot

CALL your health care provider or visit a flu vaccine clinic to find out about the cost and availability of the vaccine.

TIME it right. Get the flu shot between mid-October and mid-November to allow antibodies to build up.



Fight the Flu

Antiviral medications, available in pill or inhaler form, can reduce the severity of flu symptoms if taken soon after symptoms begin to appear. Asthma medications can sometimes help treat a dry cough that persists after other flu symptoms go away.

KNOW who should get a flu shot. In general, anyone who wants to avoid the flu should consider getting the vaccine, but it is especially recommended for these groups:

- People 65 and over
- Nursing home patients
- Children 6-23 months
- People who smoke, have heart disease or have other chronic health conditions
- Those around older people or people with health problems, such as health care workers

UNDERSTAND who should not get a shot. The list includes anyone who is allergic to eggs (the vaccine may contain egg protein); is ill, for example, with pneumonia; has a high fever; or is pregnant. Talk to your provider.

Note: When there is a flu vaccine shortage, flu shots may be limited to higher-risk groups.

SELF CARE FOR COLDS & FLU

DRINK UP. The age-old advice to drink plenty of fluids still holds. But avoid alcoholic and caffeinated beverages, since they are diuretic (increase urination) and can lead to dehydration.

GARGLE AWAY. For sore throat, gargle with warm salt water or drink warm lemon water with honey several times a day.

STEAM ON. To temporarily relieve congestion, hold your face over a steaming cup of herbal tea or bouillon, or take a warm shower.

GET COLD RELIEF. When cold symptoms are slowing you down, consider nonprescription drugs. Some experts say it's best to choose a single medication for your worst symptom to avoid potentially harmful side effects that may result from overmedicating.