

How to treat your flu symptoms

There's no good time to be sick, but no matter how busy you are, take it easy:

- Rest will help you recover sooner and reduce your risk of additional infections such as bacterial pneumonia, sinusitis, or ear infection.
- Sip broth, herbal tea, and other non-alcoholic liquids to soothe your throat and relieve congestion.
- If you smoke, now is a good time to quit. Smoking can irritate your throat and make your cough worse. We have a variety of resources to help you stop smoking for good.

Follow these guidelines to help keep the rest of your household from getting sick.

Remember, it usually takes from 1 to 3 weeks for a cold or flu to run its course. When you feel better, ease back into your routine slowly.

Over-the-counter medicines

No two viruses are the same, so "one size doesn't fit all" when it comes to over-the-counter (OTC) medicines to relieve cold and flu symptoms. Choose medicines that treat the symptoms that bother you most. When using over-the-counter remedies, keep in mind:

- **Over-the-counter cold and cough medicines can be dangerous for young children.** Do not give these medicines to children under 4 years of age. Some products are also not recommended for children under 6. Cough and cold medicines have not been proven to be effective for children under age 6. Find additional information about treating colds and flu for children.
- Generic over-the-counter drugs are just as effective as brand-name ones and can save you money.
- Avoid "cold" remedies that combine drugs to treat many different symptoms. These products often combine decongestants, antihistamines, and pain relievers. It is better to treat symptoms separately.
- Antihistamines are not an effective treatment for colds. But they are often included in multi-symptom nighttime cold remedies to help you sleep.

Ache and fever relief

- Keep your room comfortably cool and dress lightly.
- Take acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) or naproxen (Aleve).

Use these medications safely

- Many cold, flu, allergy, and pain products contain acetaminophen. Read the Drug Facts label and make sure you're not taking more than 4,000 milligrams in any 24-hour period.
- Avoid alcohol while you're taking acetaminophen. Together, alcohol and acetaminophen can damage your liver.
- Talk to your doctor or pharmacist before taking nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) - such as ibuprofen and naproxen (Aleve) - if you're allergic to ibuprofen or taking blood-thinning medicines such as warfarin (Coumadin).
- Do not take aspirin or ibuprofen during pregnancy.
- Do not give aspirin to children or teens under 20 years old.

Settle your sniffles

- If your nose is dry from blowing or cold weather, rinse with a saline nose spray or drops to moisten it. Saline rinses can also help clear your nasal passages to relieve congestion and prevent infections. Learn more about nasal sprays and neti pots.
- Breathe warm, moist air from a steamy shower, a hot bath, a sink filled with hot (not boiling) water, or a humidifier.
- Apply moist heat (a warm towel) to your face 3 to 4 times a day for 5 to 10 minutes each time.
- Take a decongestant, such as pseudoephedrine (Sudafed) or phenylephrine (Sudafed PE). (Don't use either of these medications if you have high blood pressure or heart disease.)
- If you use a decongestant nasal spray, such as oxymetazoline (Afrin), don't use it for more than 3 days in a row. Continued or overuse may lead to a "rebound" effect, when the mucous membranes swell up more than before using the spray.
- If your nose is red and raw from rubbing with tissues, try putting petroleum jelly (Vaseline) on the sore area.
- Home treatment is often all you need to treat a runny nose.

Calm your cough

- Fill a humidifier or vaporizer with plain water and breathe in the mist. Do not add medication to the water, and make sure you clean your machine thoroughly after each use.
- Use cough drops or cough syrup to soothe irritation.
- Try a cough suppressant containing dextromethorphan (Robitussin-DM or Delsym). Be sure to check the label for warnings if you're taking other medications.
- Drink tea with honey and lemon, preferably decaffeinated tea.

Soothe your sore throat

- Gargle with warm salt water twice a day. Mix 1 teaspoon of salt in 1 cup of warm water.
- Moisten your throat by sucking on ice chips, lozenges, or sugar-free hard candies.
- Use a sore throat spray or medicated lozenges, such as Chloraseptic or Cepacol.

Vitamins, herbs, and supplements

Learn more about popular cold and flu remedies, including vitamin C, echinacea, and zinc.

When to contact your Doctor

If you feel as though your symptoms may represent a more serious illness, contact your Doctor.