

# MANAGING YOUR COMMON COLD



The common cold is an infection of airways of the nose, throat, upper windpipe, and ears. Colds are most common in winter, when viruses spread easily among people indoors.

## What Is a Common Cold?

The common cold, also called an acute upper respiratory tract infection (URI), is an infection of airways of the nose, throat, upper windpipe, and ears.

People in the United States have 1 billion colds yearly. They're most common in children, who usually have 6 to 10 colds yearly. Adults average two to four. Women, especially 20 to 30 years old, have more colds than men. People older than 60 average less than one cold a year.

More than 200 different viruses cause colds. Colds are most common in children.



## What Causes a Common Cold?

More than 200 different viruses cause colds. The ones called rhinoviruses cause about one third of adult colds. Coronaviruses cause a large percentage of adult colds. Causes of 30% to 50% of adult colds aren't clear. Colds are most common in winter, when viruses spread easily among people indoors.

Being very tired or stressed (weakened immune system) and having allergies can increase chances of getting a cold.



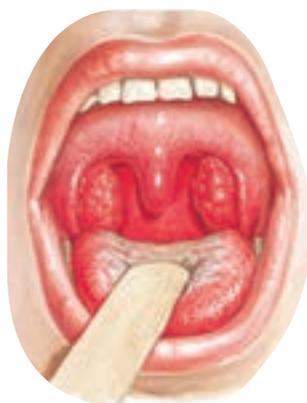
## What Are the Symptoms of a Common Cold?

Symptoms usually start 2 to 3 days after infection and last 2 to 14 days. Most are in the nose, throat, and ears and include sore throat, dry cough, low fever, watery eyes, hoarse voice, and stuffy, runny nose. Sneezing, headache, no appetite, and feeling tired are others.

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## How Is a Common Cold Diagnosed?

There are no specific blood tests or x-rays needed to diagnose the common cold. Seeing a health care provider isn't needed for a cold. Symptoms that are severe or last more than a week might need tests to check for strep throat or sinus infection that can mimic the common cold.



Sinus exam



You don't need to see your health care provider for a cold. Symptoms that are severe or last more than a week might need tests to check for strep throat or sinus infection.



Symptoms are treated by bed rest, fluids (e.g., water, fruit juice), gargling with warm salt-water, and acetaminophen (for headache or fever). Eat your regular diet.

Call your health care provider if you have constant coughing, trouble breathing between coughing bouts, high fever, and painful, swollen neck glands.



Hand washing is the easiest and best way to avoid getting colds. Sneeze or cough into a facial tissue and throw it right away.

## How Is a Common Cold Treated?

Only symptoms are treated, by bed rest, fluids (water, fruit juice, tea, carbonated beverages), gargling with warm saltwater, and use of acetaminophen for headache or fever. Eat a regular diet.

Over-the-counter cold remedies (decongestants, cough suppressants) may relieve symptoms but won't prevent, cure, or shorten colds. Most also have side effects. Over-the-counter antihistamines may help a runny nose and watery eyes.

Sometimes people may get a bacterial infection following the cold that the health care provider will need to treat.

## DOs and DON'Ts in Managing a Common Cold:

- ✓ **DO** use saltwater drops for a stuffy nose.
- ✓ **DO** use a rubber bulb syringe to clean a really stuffy baby's nose. Loosen thick sticky nasal drainage with drops of saltwater solution.
- ✓ **DO** remember that cold weather has little or no effect on whether you get a cold.
- ✓ **DO** understand that hand washing is the easiest and best way to avoid getting colds. Not touching the nose or eyes is another. Sneeze or cough into a facial tissue and throw it right away. Stay away from people who have colds.
- ✓ **DO** eat a well-balanced, healthy diet with citrus fruits and other sources of vitamin C.
- ✓ **DO** realize that antibiotics don't kill viruses, so antibiotics aren't useful for colds.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you have symptoms of a secondary bacterial infection.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if your baby won't drink fluids.
- ⊗ **DON'T** put cotton swabs into a child's nose. Use a tissue or swab outside the nose.
- ⊗ **DON'T** give aspirin to children and teenagers with a viral illness, because of the risk of Reye's syndrome, a serious illness.
- ⊗ **DON'T** forget that taking large doses of vitamin C is not effective to prevent colds.

### FROM THE DESK OF

#### NOTES

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

#### Contact the following source:

- American Academy of Family Physicians
- Tel: (800) 274-2237
- Website: <http://www.aafp.org>