Cold / Flu-like symptoms and treatment

The common cold is one of 200 viruses. The symptoms of a cold may include: runny nose, red eyes, sneezing, sore throat, dry cough, headache and general body aches. There is a gradual 1- or 2-day onset. As the cold progresses, the nasal mucus may thicken. This is the stage just before the cold dries up. A cold usually lasts 1-2 weeks, but can often last up to 3 weeks.

Colds occur throughout the year. Antibiotics are not indicated for colds, since antibiotics cannot kill viruses. There is no cure for the common cold. If you catch a cold, treat the symptoms and take care of yourself.

**Treatment:**

* Get extra rest. Slow down just a little from your routine. It isn’t necessary to stay home in bed.
* Drink plenty of liquids. Hot water, tea, chicken soup will help relieve congestion and ease a dry or sore throat. Eat light, easily digested foods.
* Cough drops can soothe an irritated throat. Expensive, medicine-flavored cough drops are not any better than inexpensive, candy-flavored ones or hard candy.
* For a sore throat or postnasal drip, gargle with 1 teaspoon of salt mixed with 8 ounces of hot water.
* Take ibuprofen (Advil) or acetaminophen (Tylenol) according to package directions to relieve aches and pains. Read labels carefully on combination products, as they may already contain ibuprofen and/or acetaminophen.
* Talk to a pharmacist about over-the-counter cold remedies. The stronger, most effective decongestants must be obtained from behind the counter at a pharmacy, rather than from the shelf in the “colds” section.
* Take hot showers to relieve nasal stuffiness and ease body aches.

**When to call a Health Care Professional:**

The following signs may be an indication of a developing bacterial infection:

- Fever of 102 degrees or higher for 2 full days, or
- Fever of 101 degrees or higher for 3 full days, or
- Fever of 100 degrees or higher for 4 full days

Labored, shallow, rapid breathing with shortness of breath

Sinus or jaw pain, neck stiffness, severe headache

Cough that lingers for more than 7 – 10 days after other symptoms have cleared, particularly if it produces mucus. It can be normal for a dry, hacking cough to last several weeks after a cold.

**Sore Throat and Strep Throat:**

Most sore throats are caused by viruses and may occur with a cold or may follow a cold.

Strep throat is a sore throat caused by a bacterial infection. Strep throat is common in children from 3 – 15 years of age.

In general, the more cold-like your symptoms are, the less likely it is that you have strep throat.
Symptoms of strep throat:

- Severe and sudden onset sore throat
- Fever of 101 degrees or higher
- Swollen lymph nodes in the neck
- White or yellow coating (spots) on the tonsils

Coughs:

Coughing is the body’s way of removing mucus from the lungs.

**Productive coughs** produce mucus that comes up from the lungs. This kind of cough generally should not be suppressed. It is needed to clear mucus from the lungs.

**Non-Productive coughs** are dry coughs that do not produce mucus. A dry, hacking cough may develop toward the end of a cold. Dry coughs that follow a cold may last up to several weeks and often get worse at night.

Over-the-counter cough syrups may help. Do not take anyone else’s prescription cough medicine.

Fever:

A fever is a high body temperature. It is a symptom, not a disease. A fever is one way your body fights illness. A temperature of up to 102 degrees can be helpful because it helps the body respond to infection. Most adults can tolerate a fever as high as 103 – 104 degrees for short periods of time.

- Drink 8 – 12 glasses of water a day. You are drinking enough if you are urinating more often than usual.
- Take and record your temperature every 4 hours.
- Take ibuprofen (Advil) or acetaminophen (Tylenol) according to the package directions.
- Take a lukewarm shower if a fever causes discomfort.
- Dress lightly.
- Eat light, easily digested foods.

Influenza (Flu):

Influenza, or flu, is a viral illness that commonly occurs in the winter. Flu is not the same as the common cold – the symptoms of flu are usually more severe and come on quite suddenly. Symptoms may include fever (101 – 104 degrees), shaking chills, body aches, muscle pain, headache, pain when you move your eyes, fatigue, weakness and runny nose. Symptoms may last up to 10 days. Although a normally healthy person with the flu feels very sick, the illness seldom leads to more serious complications.

Laryngitis:

Laryngitis is an irritation of the voice box. The most common cause is a viral infection such as a cold. Symptoms may include hoarseness or loss of voice, the urge to clear your throat, fever, tiredness, throat pain, and cough.

Medication does little to speed recovery. Your voice box will heal in 5 – 10 days.

Rest your voice. Talk as little as possible. Don’t shout or whisper and avoid clearing your throat.

Dick’s House nurses are available 24/7 during fall, winter and spring terms to counsel, triage and assess your concerns. Please call 646-9440.

To schedule an appointment with a clinician, please use our web-book appointment system, available thru your banner student page or at [www.dartmouth.edu/~health](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~health). Call the Appointment Office at 646-9401 if you have additional questions or concerns.