

# Cold and Flu

**Healthy Lifestyle** - Healthy habits such as eating balanced meals, getting sufficient exercise and getting enough sleep helps your body maintain a strong immune system to fight off the germs that can cause the cold and flu.

**Flu shots** - Annual flu shots can reduce the chances of getting many flu viruses and are highly recommended for people who have a higher risk of catching the flu. Young children and people over 65 years old can benefit greatly from flu shots. In addition, people who have medical conditions and have weakened immune systems should have flu shots. Certain jobs put people at a higher risk of coming in contact with flu viruses such as health care workers, nursing home employees, and even teachers. These people should consider getting flu shots. Your doctor can answer any questions you have regarding flu shots.

## When should I see a doctor?

If your symptoms persist or if you have some of the following symptoms, you should see your doctor.

- Severe and continuous vomiting or diarrhea lasting 8 hours
- Vomiting or diarrhea for longer than 24 hours
- High fever
- Shaking chills
- Earache
- Difficulty breathing
- Skin rash
- Delirium
- Cough or nasal secretions of thick green or gray
- Uncontrollable cough
- Cough that sounds like a “seal bark”

Your doctor will evaluate these symptoms to see if they are caused by something other than a cold or flu virus.

## Prevent your cold from spreading

If you have the cold or flu, it is easy to spread it to someone else and easy to get it back again, so try not to spread it using the following techniques.

1. Wash your hands frequently. People can catch your virus by touching something you have touched after coughing or sneezing.
2. Avoid close contact with others during your illness. Moms and children catch and spread colds easily through close contact.
3. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing and sneezing.
4. Dispose of all your tissues immediately after you use them. Don't leave them where people could come in contact with them.
5. Wash your bed clothes after your symptoms are gone to get rid of lingering germs.



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## Why discuss colds and flu together?

The common cold and the flu are very similar. They are both viruses and they cannot be treated with antibiotics which only work against bacteria. Both attack the nose, nasal sinuses, throat and upper breathing tubes known as the trachea and bronchi. Both can have similar symptoms although the flu is more severe. There is no known cure for the cold and flu. Instead, medical professionals focus on prevention or treating the symptoms.

## What are the symptoms of a cold?



Colds are very common. They are caused by hundreds of different viruses and are highly contagious. They spread by people inhaling the germs from either a sneeze or cough or by touching something that has been contaminated with

the germs and then touching their nose, eyes or mouth. The nose is often affected and, symptoms can begin 1 to 5 days after contact with the virus. They usually last about 7 days, but occasionally linger a few days longer. Symptoms of a cold can include the following:

- Irritation in nose and scratchy feeling in the throat, these are usually the first symptoms
- Sneezing with watery nasal discharge
- Nasal discharge turning yellow or green a day or two after the beginning of symptoms
- Congested eardrums
- Mild fatigue
- Mild aches
- Headache
- Cough which sometimes lingers after other symptoms have gone.

## What are the symptoms of the flu?

The flu is an infection of the respiratory system caused by influenza viruses. Although similar to a cold, it can be much more severe especially in younger children, seniors and people suffering from certain medical conditions such as chronic respiratory diseases, kidney disease and diabetes. As with a cold, the flu is spread through droplets from sneezes and coughs. Symptoms usually appear 2 to 3 days after contact but can take up to 7 days to show up. Typical flu symptoms can include the following:

- Fever - Temperature can be noticeably high in children at the beginning of an influenza infection and usually lasts 2 to 3 days. Fever is uncommon in adults.
- Flushed face
- Severe muscle and body aches
- Shortness of breath
- Severe and lingering fatigue - This lack of energy can last for weeks.
- Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea - common especially in children
- Severe headache
- Cold-like respiratory symptoms - These occur later in the illness and include head, congestion sore throat and dry hacking cough.

## How do I treat a cold or the flu?

Most cold and flu viruses go away on their own, however, you can treat the symptoms which will make you feel better during the illness period. Treatments for cold and flu include the following:

**Rest** - This is one of the most important things that you can do. If you don't rest, your symptoms can get worse, your recovery can be delayed and you can have a relapse.

**Drink fluids** - Drinking about two litres of clear liquids a day will help promote drainage of the respiratory system.

**Humidify dry air** - Moist air will help decrease the swelling of the respiratory tract and clear mucus.

**Avoid smoke** - Cigarette smoke will irritate the respiratory tract and worsen or prolong symptoms.



**Over the counter medication** - There are many cold and flu medications sold at your local PharmaChoice. It is best to purchase one to treat your individual symptoms. Talk to your PharmaChoice pharmacist for more information on which medication is best for you.

**Treating infants and young children** - Special consideration should be given to infants and young children. It is not recommended that they be treated with cold and flu medications due to possible side effects. Stuffy noses can be treated with saline nose drops and suctioned with a bulb syringe. Your PharmaChoice pharmacist can provide you with information and instructions on the use of these items.

## What can I do to prevent catching a cold or flu virus?

There is no way to guarantee that you will never catch a cold or flu virus ever again but you can do certain things that will reduce your chances.

**Wash your hands frequently** - This is the most effective thing you can do to prevent catching cold or flu viruses or spreading one to someone else. Both cold and flu can be spread by touching things such as door knobs or telephones that have been contaminated and then touching your nose, eyes or mouth.

**Don't smoke** - Smokers are more susceptible to respiratory viruses. Children of smokers also catch more respiratory viruses and have more ear infections than children of nonsmokers.

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