

Cough and Cold

What is a Cold?

A group of symptoms caused by a large number of different viruses.

What are the symptoms of a Cold?

Symptoms usually include sore throat, cough, nasal congestion, runny nose, and sneezing. Colds typically last 3 to 7 days.

What medicine can I take to make it better?

A good question, all medicines are currently aimed at making the symptoms better; no current medications shorten or cure the common cold. Antibiotics are not useful against colds.

The Pharmacy Awareness Campaign Presents

Cough and Cold

So many drugs; how do I choose?



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Cold Treatment

Decongestants

If your nose is stuffy (nasal congestion), decongestants can help reduce the swelling in your nasal passages, and help you to breathe easier. However, they can cause increased heart rate and restlessness. Therefore, if you have high blood pressure, heart problems, or thyroid conditions you should check with your doctor before using decongestants.

- **Nasal spray decongestants** usually work quickly, but they can have a rebound effect that makes your nose even more congested if you use them for more than 3-5 days.
- **Oral decongestants** are slower to take effect, but they will not lead to rebound congestion and they usually require less frequent dosing.

Cough syrup

There are usually two different types of coughs associated with a cold, and each is treated differently:

- A **productive cough** is one where mucus is present. Using an expectorant to encourage coughing may be useful to help remove the mucus from your lungs or airway. If the mucus is yellow, green, or contains blood, contact your doctor.
- A **non-productive cough** is a dry cough with no mucus. This cough can be suppressed because continual dry coughing may cause hoarseness and throat irritation. Using cough syrup or lozenges that contain Dextromethorphan (DM) will help suppress the cough.

Antihistamines

Antihistamines relieve allergy symptoms, such as a runny nose and watery eyes. Antihistamines are not routinely effective for colds as histamine is not the main pathway by which viruses cause symptoms.

- Antihistamines are the main ingredient in most bedtime formulations of cough and cold combinations secondary to their increased risk of drowsiness.

Dosing and drug selection

Ask your pharmacist, they are trained to help you identify an appropriate drug and treatment plan, if one is available.

Reasons not to treat at home

- **Fever of > 101.5 ° F**
- **Chest Pain**
- **Shortness of Breath**
- **Underlying breathing or heart problems**
 - **Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)**
 - **Asthma**
 - **Heart Failure**
- **HIV or AIDS**

Resources

1. Handbook of non-prescription drugs: an interactive approach to self care. 16th edition. 2009.
2. British Columbia Medical Association accessed November 29, 2010 <https://www.bcma.org/patient-advocacy/patient-pamphlets>