

# Treating the Common Cold in Adults

## What do I do if I have a cold?

Most colds don't cause serious illness and will get better over time. Cold symptoms in adults can be treated with some over-the-counter medicines. Talk to your doctor about what is best for you.

## What over-the-counter treatments are helpful in adults?

- Choosing an over-the-counter medicine that contains an antihistamine and a decongestant may help you cough less and breathe better through your nose. Cough medicines such as dextromethorphan (one brand: Robitussin) and guaifenesin (one brand: Mucinex) may help some people.
- If you have a headache or body aches, pain medicines such as ibuprofen (one brand: Advil) can help. The pain medicine naproxen (one brand: Aleve) also may be used for cough.
- Herbal products, such as *Echinacea purpurea*, *Pelargonium sidoides* (geranium) extract (one brand: Umcka Coldcare), and *Andrographis paniculata* (one brand: Kalmcold), may reduce cold symptoms.

- Zinc taken in the first 24 hours of cold symptoms may reduce how many days you have a cold, and you may also get fewer symptoms. You can take one lozenge every two hours while awake for as long as you have cold symptoms. But, they may give you a bad taste in your mouth or upset your stomach. Zinc nose sprays should not be used.

## What treatments are not helpful in adults?

- Antibiotics
- Antihistamines without decongestants
- Codeine
- *Echinacea angustifolia*
- Saline nasal spray
- Vitamin C

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**This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.**

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