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 breath 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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