

Treating the Common Cold in Adults

What should I do if I have a cold?

Most colds don't cause serious illness and will get better over time. Adults can treat cold symptoms with over-the-counter medicines. Talk to your doctor about what is best for you.

What treatments are helpful for 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.
- If you have a headache or body aches, pain medicines such as ibuprofen (one brand: Advil) can help.
- Acetaminophen (one brand: Tylenol) may temporarily help a runny or stuffy nose.
- Nasal decongestant sprays (one brand: Afrin) may help you breathe better through your nose. Pay careful attention to the dosing instructions on the package. You shouldn't use it for more than three days or your stuffy nose could get worse.
- Zinc lozenges might help your cold go away faster, and you may get fewer symptoms. But this only works if you start taking them within 24 hours

after your symptoms start. Take one lozenge every two hours while you're awake for as long as you have cold symptoms. They may leave a bad taste in your mouth or upset your stomach. Zinc nose sprays should not be used.

- Taking vitamin C every day doesn't keep you from getting sick, but it might help your cold go away faster. It won't help if you start taking it once you already have cold symptoms.

What treatments are not helpful for adults?

- Antibiotics are not helpful because they don't kill viruses. Cold symptoms are almost always caused by viruses.
- Antihistamines without decongestants
- Antivirals
- Cough medicines such as dextromethorphan (one brand: Robitussin) and guaifenesin (one brand: Mucinex)
- Codeine
- Echinacea (ek-eh-NAY-shuh)
- Saline nose spray
- Steroid nose spray (one brand: Flonase)

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