

Cold Care

How can I feel better when I have a cold?

First signs of a common cold, also called an upper respiratory infection (URI), typically include a sore throat and runny nose, followed by coughing and sneezing. The common cold is caused by a virus. Antibiotics will not help you recover from a cold.

If you catch a cold, it's recommended that you get lots of rest, drink plenty of fluids, and avoid smoking and second-hand smoke. Colds can last from one to two weeks, but there are a number of ways to relieve symptoms. Over-the-counter (OTC) medications may help ease symptoms, but some products may contain medications or alcohol you don't need or want. Always use as directed and consult your health care provider if you have questions, especially if you have a chronic health condition or are taking other prescription or OTC medications. Below are some tips on how to feel better based on the symptoms you are experiencing:

Sore throat

- Soothe a sore throat with warm liquids such as soup or tea and honey; ice chips, lozenges, or a salt water gargle (1/4 to 1/2 teaspoon of salt dissolved in an 8-ounce glass of warm water).
- Use a humidifier or cool mist vaporizer to add moisture to the air, soothing mucous membranes.
- Acetaminophen (e.g., Tylenol), ibuprofen (e.g., Advil or Motrin), or naproxen (Aleve) can help with throat discomfort (and fever).
- Try drinking herbal tea with honey, such as Throat Coat Tea

Cough

- Try the suggestions above for soothing a sore throat.
- Cough medicines may be helpful — consult a healthcare provider or pharmacist if you're not sure which one to choose. A product containing *dextromethorphan* (Robitussin) will help suppress a cough. *Guaifenesin* (Mucinex) is an ingredient that helps to liquefy mucus, allowing it to be coughed up and relieving congestion.
- Cough drops to suck on will keep your throat moist; drink plenty of water, too.

Nasal congestion

- A warm compress over the nose and forehead can help relieve sinus pressure.
- Use a decongestant like pseudoephedrine (Sudafed) or nasal saline spray (Ayer Saline Mist or Netti Pot).
- Breathing in steam for 10-20 minutes several times a day may also relieve congestion.

Headache, body aches, or fever

- Acetaminophen, ibuprofen, or naproxen can help to relieve pain and reduce fever.

When should I see a healthcare provider?

- If you have a temperature higher than 100.4°F (38°C)
- If your symptoms last more than 10 days
- If your symptoms are severe such as chest pain or shortness of breath

Online & Off-Campus Resources

Columbia Health: health.columbia.edu

Go Ask Alice!: goaskalice.columbia.edu

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On-Campus Resources

Medical Services: 212-854-7426