

Common Cold Self Care

Most upper respiratory tract infections are caused by a variety of different viruses. **Antibiotics do not treat viral infections** and, in fact, may be harmful if given when not needed.

Symptoms may last for 7-10 days, but some infections linger with diminishing severity for 3 to 4 weeks.

Cold viruses are spread from person to person through coughs, sneezes, and mucus on a people's hands. Washing your hands or using hand sanitizers frequently will reduce your chances of getting a cold.

Call the advice nurse at (814) 863-4463 if any of the following happens:

- **Illness > one week**
- **Persistent fever over 100.4 F**
- **severe sore throat > than 3 days**
- **Difficulty swallowing oral secretions**
- **Difficulty breathing**
- **Severe headache**
- **Stiff neck or neck pain**
- **Inability to bend chin to chest without pain**
- **Mental changes or confusion**
- **Rash**
- **Chest pain**
- **Severe shortness of breath**
- **wheezing**
- **Coughing up blood**
- **Pain in abdomen**
- **Sudden dizziness**
- **Presence of chronic medical condition(diabetes, asthma, etc.)**
- **Disease or medication that decreases immune function**
- **Possibility of pregnancy**
- **Recent pregnancy**



Over-the-counter medications may help you feel better while your body's own defenses are combating the virus.

If you have fever . . .

Normal body temperature is thought to range from 97° - 100° F. Since a fever is one of your body's natural healing mechanisms, you may not want to reduce it unless you are uncomfortable or it is too high.

- Drink plenty of fluids (water, fruit juice, soup, etc.) every few hours to replace fluids lost.**
- Take ibuprofen (Advil®), naproxen (Aleve) or acetaminophen (Tylenol®) as directed on the package.**

If you have nasal congestion . . .

Nasal congestion has many causes: a cold, the flu, other infections, or an allergy to food, chemicals, or other substances like pollen or dust. If your nasal congestion is caused by allergies, try one of the newer non-sedating antihistamines (see details box). If from a common cold . . .

- Use salt water nasal irrigation (see details box).**

Common Cold Self Care

Continued

- Take an antihistamine (1st generation) at bedtime** to dry secretions and aid sleep (see details box).
- Take a decongestant containing pseudoephedrine** (see details box).
- Consider use of nasal decongestant spray containing oxymetazoline for a very limited period of time** (see details box next page).

If you have a cough . . .

Coughing is your body's way of trying to clear the airways of mucus and infection. It is important to determine if your cough is caused by an infection, an allergy, or an irritant.

- Take a hot shower** to loosen congestion and thin mucus.
- Suck on cough drops** to soothe an irritated throat.
- Take a 1st generation antihistamine at bedtime** to dry secretions, suppress cough and aid sleep. (see details box)
- Consider adding a cough suppressant containing dextromethorphan.**

If you have a sore throat . . .

The two main causes for the common sore throat are viruses and bacteria. Only sore throats caused by bacterial infections can be treated with antibiotics. **Typical symptoms for bacterial sore throat include a sore throat that persists for three to four days, a fever of 101° or higher, swollen glands in the neck, and white patches on the tonsils or the back of the throat.**

- Suck on cough drops or lozenges** medicated with menthol, benzocaine, or camphor. (Examples that contain benzocaine include Sucrets or Chloraseptic)
- Take ibuprofen (Advil®) or acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or naproxen (Aleve®) as directed. DO NOT USE ASPIRIN.**

IMPORTANT CAUTION: Most cold and flu preparations contain a combination of ingredients, so it is important to read the labels of each product. Sometimes, if you take more than one product, you may be getting a double dose of an active ingredient and/or not getting enough of another.

In an emergency go to Mount Nittany Medical Center or call 911 for an ambulance.

Test Results and Advice Nurse

Send secure message to advice nurse via the UHS website or call 814- 863-4463.

Appointments

Appointments can be made online via the UHS website, by phone 814-863-0774, or in person. If you are unable to keep your appointment, please call or go online to cancel. Otherwise you will be charged for the visit.

This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. This information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.

MEDICATION DETAILS BOX

SALT WATER NASAL IRRIGATION

Various saline nasal sprays and nasal saline rinse kits are available commercially. Do not use tap water. Distilled or sterile water is preferred. The most convenient way to perform a sinus rinse is in the shower or over a sink.

ANTIHISTAMINE (1st generation)

These medications are available without a prescription and include brompheniramine (generic for DimeTapp), chlorpheniramine (generic for Chlor-Trimeton and Singlet), diphenhydramine (generic for Benadryl), or doxylamine (generic for NyQuil).

ANTIHISTAMINES (newer non-sedating) These antihistamines can be used to treat allergies, but do not have the same degree of effectiveness for treating colds. Examples include loratadine (Claritin), cetirizine (Zyrtec) and fexofenadine (Allegra).

DECONGESTANT (pseudoephedrine)

Decongestants purchased off the shelf contain phenylephrine and are much less effective. You must ask the pharmacist for pseudoephedrine (regulated because of illegal use to make methamphetamine), although no prescription is required. Oral decongestants may produce rapid heart rate, blood pressure elevation, nervous stimulation, and restlessness which may interfere with sleep.

OXYMETAZOLINE NASAL SPRAY

Oxymetazoline nasal spray (generic Afrin) can rapidly relieve nasal obstruction, however, when the decongestant effect of the drug wears off, nasal obstruction rapidly returns. Therefore, this can be very effective, but limit use to 3 days (if used twice daily) or 5-6 nights (if only used at bedtime). Overuse by just a few days can result in "rebound" obstruction and mucosal damage.