



Home Remedies for Treating Your Cold



Did you know colds are caused by over 200 different viruses? Being around people who are already sick, lack of sleep, stress, & respiratory allergies can raise your chances of catching a cold. The best treatment for a cold is to stay home & take care of yourself. Two things to remember: always cover your mouth & nose with a tissue or your upper shirt sleeve before sneezing or coughing, & wash your hands frequently, especially after blowing your nose.

Nothing can cure a cold, but there are some do-it-yourself remedies that can help ease your symptoms & keep you from feeling so miserable.

What Works

- * Stay hydrated: water, juice, clear broth, or warm lemon water with honey can help break up congestion & prevent dehydration—avoid coffee, caffeinated sodas, & alcohol which can increase dehydration
- * Stay warm & rest: your body needs its energy to heal—sleep helps you fight infection
- * For sore throat: gargling 4 times a day with 1/2 teaspoon of salt dissolved in 8 ounces of very warm water can temporarily relieve a sore or scratchy throat—you can also try ice chips, sore throat sprays, slippery elm or other lozenges, or hard candy
- * For stuffy nose: saline nasal sprays as needed can help relief stuffiness & congestion—check with your primary care provider (PCP) before using non-saline nasal sprays
- * For sinuses: apply reusable hot or cold packs around your congested sinuses—or try using a neti pot (for safety, use only sterile, distilled, or boiled tap water that has cooled)
- * For pain: acetaminophen (brand name, Tylenol) only for children & teens, adults can use acetaminophen, aspirin or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin)—don't exceed recommended dosing
- * Sip warm liquids: herbal tea, warm apple juice, & chicken soup (Grandma was right!) may be soothing & ease congestion by increasing mucus flow
- * Steam up your respiratory tract: take a hot shower (close the bathroom door to retain the steam) & breathe in the moisture—blow your nose in the shower to clear your sinuses
- * Add moisture to the air: a cool-mist vaporizer or humidifier can add moisture which may help loosen congestion—change the water daily & clean the unit well
- * Over-the-counter (OTC) cold & cough medications: OTC pain relievers, decongestants, & antihistamines can offer some symptom relief but most have some side effects so check with your PCP—note: overuse & misuse of these medications can cause serious damage
- * Sleep with an extra pillow: the extra elevation helps relieve congested nasal passages to make breathing easier



What Doesn't Work

- * Antibiotics only work against bacterial infections, not viruses—don't use old antibiotics left over from some other condition, & remember that the inappropriate use of antibiotics contributes to the development of antibiotic-resistant bacteria
- * OTC cold & cough medications may cause serious & even life-threatening side effects in young children—check with your child's primary care provider before giving a young child any medications

The Jury's Still Out

Some widely recommended supplements may modestly reduce cold symptoms, but research studies have shown mixed or limited results. Other products have not been sufficiently studied, may cause adverse effects or interact with other drugs you are taking, or are just plain ineffective. More research is needed to prove their usefulness against the common cold. Check with your PCP before taking unproven alternative remedies. Some of these are:

- * Vitamin C—may cause kidney stones & GI issues at high doses
- * Vitamin D—conflicting results
- * Airborne—risk of toxicity, can interfere with other medications
- * Andrographis—may have risks for people with certain conditions
- * Astragalus—may have risks for people with certain conditions
- * Coldcalm—thought to be ineffective
- * Echinacea—may have risks for people with certain conditions
- * Elderberry—may have risks for people with certain conditions
- * Garlic—can interfere with other medications
- * Ginseng—can interfere with other medications
- * Umcka—may have risks for people with certain conditions
- * Zinc/Zicam—risk of toxicity, may cause unpleasant side effects



Heads Up

- * Do not use honey with children younger than 1 year old or anyone with a compromised immune system due to the risk of botulism
- * Be careful with the use of multiple medications due to the danger of exceeding safe dosage limits, potential side effects, & possible drug interactions

Prevention

Common colds are the main reason that children miss school & adults miss work. Most people recover from a cold in 7 to 10 days, but we would all rather not get a cold in the first place. Cold viruses spread through the air & through close personal contact. Touching an infected person or a contaminated surface, then touching your face is a common method of viral transmission. How can you reduce your risk of getting a cold? Wash your hands with soap & water often, avoid touching your eyes, nose & mouth with unwashed hands, & stay away from people who are sick. Eating well, exercising regularly, & managing your stress might also help keep colds away. Just some common sense tools for beating the common cold.