

COLDS + FLU what to do

A cold is an upper respiratory infection caused by a virus. Symptoms include runny nose, sneezing, cough, sore throat, body aches, headaches, low fever, and congestion of the ears, nose and head. Colds usually last for a few days, but can persist for weeks.

Influenza, or the “flu,” is caused by a virus, usually in the winter. Flu symptoms, which include high fever and cough, are more severe than cold symptoms. Flu usually has a sudden onset and lasts 1-2 weeks. Complications are uncommon in young, healthy people but may include pneumonia, bronchitis, ear or sinus infections. Consider getting a flu shot to protect yourself.

SELF-CARE

- **Lots of liquids.** Drink 6-8 cups daily; avoid alcohol.
- **Plenty of rest.** With mild symptoms, you can continue daily activities. If symptoms are severe, take it easy until you feel better.
- **Moist air** from a humidifier or hot shower can ease symptoms and make it easier to breathe.
- **Stop smoking and avoid secondhand smoke.** Smoking prolongs symptoms and increase risk of complications.
- **Be patient.** A cold or flu may last 2 days or 2 weeks. Take care of yourself so your body can heal.

MEDICATIONS

There is no cure for a cold or flu, and no medicines that kill these viruses. (Antibiotics kill bacteria, and so do not help with viral infections.) Over-the-counter products can relieve symptoms. Choose a single medicine for a specific symptom, rather than an all-in-one preparation. If you do take an all-in-one, check ingredients to be sure you're not “doubling up” with medicines you're taking separately, such as pain medications. Generics are as effective as brand names, and much cheaper. The back of this card lists active ingredients in brand names so you can find generic equivalents.

Any medicine has potential side effects. Read labels carefully for warnings, follow instructions, and use only as needed. Decongestants. Medicines with pseudoephedrine (e.g. Sudafed®) can help nasal congestion. Antihistamines relieve congestion and sneezing from hay fever/allergies, but are *not* effective for colds/flu.

MEDICATIONS TO HELP RELIEVE SYMPTOMS

- **Nasal sprays/drops.** Saline will thin secretions and help unblock a stuffy nose. Make some by mixing ¼ teaspoon salt in 4 oz. water, or buy saline nose drops. Medications with *oxymetazoline* (e.g Afrin®) shrink mucous membranes. These can cause rebound congestion, so use with caution.
- **Pain medications.** For fever, headache, or muscle aches, use acetaminophen (Tylenol®), aspirin, ibuprofen (Advil®), or naproxen (Aleve®).

- **Cough drops and lozenges** help keep the throat moist, and can lessen discomfort and dry cough.
- **Cough suppressants.** A productive cough serves a function, so it's best not to suppress it. But if a cough is dry, irritating, or keeps you awake, cough syrup may help. Cough syrups are of two types: "suppressant" and "expectorant." For a suppressant, use a preparation with *dextromethorphan*. For a tight cough, look for an expectorant with *guaifensin*.
- **Anesthetic spray** can help throat pain. Products such as Chloroseptic® numb the throat so that swallowing is less painful. Gargle with warm salt water (1/2 teas. salt in 8 oz. water) every 2 hours to reduce throat pain.

COMPLICATIONS

The following may be signs of complications. Contact UHS Advice Nurse at (510) 643-7197 if you have:

- Symptoms lasting more than 3 weeks, or fever more than 5 days. Fever over 102°F, or over 101 °F with severe sore throat for 24 hours, or over 100°F for five days.
- Severe chest pain, difficulty breathing or swallowing.
- Cough or nasal discharge that is bloody, brown, or green. Recent close contact with someone with strep throat. Severe headache, ear pain or discharge or pain in cheeks or upper teeth.
- Fever with rash, stiff neck, irritability, or mental confusion. Sudden or persistent hearing loss.
- Signs of dehydration: extreme thirst, infrequent urination, dark urine, light-headedness.

TO PREVENT COLDS + FLU

- Wash your hands frequently with water and soap for 15 seconds.
- Avoid touching your face. Viruses can enter your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Cover your mouth with a tissue when coughing and sneezing. Dispose of the tissue and wash hands immediately.
- Avoid sharing objects (cups, utensils, etc.)
- Drink water. Consume 6-8 cups a day, and avoid alcohol.
- Be good to yourself! Get exercise. Eat healthful foods. Get plenty of sleep.
- Find constructive ways to deal with stress. You'll build a well-functioning immune system and feel great.
- For more information on relief of colds and flu, medications, and self-care, see the UHS website (<http://uhs.berkeley.edu/home/healthtopics>) and look up Cold Care and Fighting the Flu.

Medical questions: Call the Advice Nurse at (510) 643-7197.

Medical appointments: Call (510) 642-2000.

Check our website: www.uhs.berkeley.edu to learn more about this medical concern or others.

For an appointment www.uhs.berkeley.edu or call **510-642-2000**

Clinic Nurse **510-643-7197** for advice