



In Sickness & In Health

Why Am I Sick?

Colds and the flu are caused by **viruses**, microscopic organisms which depend completely on healthy cells to survive. Since viruses cannot produce energy from outside nutrients, they must penetrate healthy cells to reproduce. It has been difficult for scientists to isolate an antiviral medication which can kill a virus without harming its host cell or the surrounding tissue.

Infections such as bronchitis, pneumonia, strep throat, sinus infections, and ear infections are usually caused by **bacteria**. Unlike viruses, bacteria live independently outside of human cells. Bacterial infections can usually be cured with antibiotics and may persist or worsen if not treated. Thus, you should seek medical care for these illnesses.

Is My Infection Viral or Bacterial?

Viral illnesses, such as colds and the flu, are usually short in duration. Most colds last about three to five days, and flu symptoms may last seven to ten days. Symptoms may include runny or stuffy nose, sneezing, fatigue, sore throat, and a dry, hacking cough.

Bacterial infections last longer. They appear similar to colds and the flu, and are often characterized by specific symptoms such as: fever greater than 102°F, thick, green, mucous-producing cough, chest pain, shortness of breath, difficulty swallowing, persistent earache, severe headache, stiff neck, swollen lymph nodes, or white patches at the back of the throat. Because it is often difficult to distinguish between viral and bacterial infections, you should consult a medical professional for any condition which persists or worsens.

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What Is the Most Effective Treatment for a Cold and/or the Flu?

Self-care is usually the most effective treatment for colds and the flu. Non-prescription medications such as antihistamines, decongestants, cough syrup, and aspirin can provide relief from symptoms produced by these illnesses. All medications should be used according to package instructions. Self-care suggestions for making yourself more comfortable during a cold or the flu include:

- Rest and stay warm.
- Increase your hours of sleep.
- Eat a well-balanced diet.
- Gargle with warm salt water, or use hard candies or cough drops to soothe a dry throat and to inhibit coughing.
- Inhale steam from a hot bath or shower to relieve congestion in your head and chest.
- Avoid smoking, as it will cause further irritation of your upper respiratory tract.
- Drink plenty of fluids (water, juices, and hot tea).
- Avoid strenuous activity until your symptoms disappear.

Is My Cold or Flu Contagious?

Cold and flu viruses can be transmitted by airborne saliva, so be sure to cover your mouth and nose when sneezing or coughing. Avoid close physical contact with others to prevent spreading the infection, and wash your hands frequently.

Can Vitamin C and Zinc Cure My Cold?

Although there is a possibility that high doses of vitamin C might provide some relief from cold symptoms, it does not prevent or cure colds. Also, high doses of vitamin C (for example, greater than 2000 mg.) may produce adverse effects, such as kidney stones, anemia and diarrhea. Zinc lozenges may also help shorten the duration of cold symptoms. But, high doses of zinc for a prolonged period of time may actually suppress immune function. So, avoid using these lozenges for longer than a week.

To find out more about colds and the flu, please visit www.snac.ucla.edu.



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WHEN YOU FEEL THAT “TICKLE” IN YOUR THROAT...

Are you feeling achy and fatigued? Is it a cold? Or perhaps a bacterial infection? Or maybe you're suffering from an allergy? Since many cold symptoms are also common to bacterial infections and allergies, it's sometimes hard to tell. Below is a table which reflects some common symptoms of each. Please note that this is a partial list and you may not experience all of the symptoms.

	VIRAL	BACTERIAL	ALLERGY
Chief Complaint	Runny nose, fatigue	Fever, fatigue	Runny nose, Watery eyes
Duration	3 to 5 days	5 days	Seasonal
Temperature	Low-grade fever <101°F	High-grade fever >102°F	None
Body Aches	Yes	Sometimes	No
Runny Nose	Yes	No	Yes
Sore Throat	May be sore	May be sore	No
Cough	Dry, hacking	Mucous producing	No
Contagious	Yes	Yes	No
For Relief of Symptoms	Antihistamines, decongestants, cough syrups or drops	Aspirin substitutes, cough syrups or drops	Antihistamines, decongestants, avoidance of allergens
Treat with Fluids & Rest	Yes	Yes	Yes
Treat with Antibiotics	No	Yes	No

Viral or Bacterial?

Bacterial infections have a rapid onset (overnight) and are associated with localized pain (e.g., sore throat) and a high fever (above 102°). Bacterial infections are generally treated with antibiotics. Consult your physician if you think you may have a bacterial infection. Colds and the flu are viral infections which cannot be treated with antibiotics. Rest and plenty of fluids are the best remedy.

Mononucleosis

Like a cold and flu, mononucleosis is a common viral illness prevalent among young adults. The virus is transmitted via mucus or saliva. The usual symptoms are fever, sore throat, swollen lymph nodes in the back of the neck, fatigue, and general discomfort. Mononucleosis typically lasts from 10 to 14 days. Antibiotics have no effect on uncomplicated cases. Aspirin substitutes and throat lozenges can relieve some of the symptoms. Rest and extra sleep are advisable.

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Aspirin Substitutes or Plain Ol' Aspirin?

Aspirin substitutes may be taken to help relieve fever, aches, and pains. They are analgesics (pain relievers) which usually contain acetaminophen or ibuprofen instead of aspirin. Aspirin substitutes are sometimes recommended because they are not associated with gastrointestinal upset.

Aspirin, also an analgesic, contains different chemical components. Aspirin can help reduce inflammation and swelling, whereas many aspirin substitutes cannot. It is helpful to keep these factors in mind when choosing between aspirin and aspirin substitutes. Aspirin has been associated with certain medical complications when taken by children or teenagers with flu symptoms. Contact a health care practitioner or pharmacist for further information on the use of both aspirin and aspirin substitutes.

Do I Need to See My Clinician?

If symptoms last more than four to five days and/or there is prolonged fever over 102°, professional medical attention should be sought. If allergy symptoms are unresponsive to non-prescription medication and/or worsen, medical attention is advised.

Self-care Suggestions

- Rest and stay warm.
- Increase your hours of sleep.
- Eat a well-balanced diet.
- Gargle with warm salt water to ease the discomfort of a sore throat.
- Inhale steam from a hot bath or shower to relieve congestion.
- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Avoid strenuous exercise.

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