

COLDS & FLU

Colds and flu are caused by infection with a virus and commonly affect our nose, throat and chest (our respiratory tract). Cold and flu viruses are always changing - this season's cold or flu virus will probably be different from last season's virus. This is why you can get a new cold or flu each year. It's also why a cure is difficult to develop, although vaccines for flu are available. Cold and flu viruses are spread by touch, for example by your hands, or through the air when you talk, sneeze, cough or breathe. Antibiotics don't kill viruses. Your doctor will not give you antibiotics for a cold or flu. Your own immune system is your best defence.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Symptoms start 1 to 4 days after catching the virus. Cold symptoms may include:

- dry or sore throat – may be the first sign, coming a day or so before other symptoms
- runny nose – clear and watery to start with, then mucus gets thicker
- blocked nose (nasal congestion) – babies may have trouble feeding
- headache – all over head or around eyes and nose
- sneezing – your body's attempt to clear nasal passages
- cough – may be dry or productive (producing phlegm)
- hoarseness – rough voice as virus causes swelling of vocal chords (voice box)

A flu can have the same symptoms as a cold (although usually more severe), but will also have:

- *fever* – feeling hot, then cold, often with shivers
- *aches* – sore, aching muscles and joints

IMPORTANT

See your doctor if you have:

- a cold/flu that doesn't improve after a week
- a fever of 38°C (100.4°F) or higher for 3 days or more
- chest pain
- a cough and/or sore throat that won't go away
- earache
- yellow, brown or green coloured phlegm

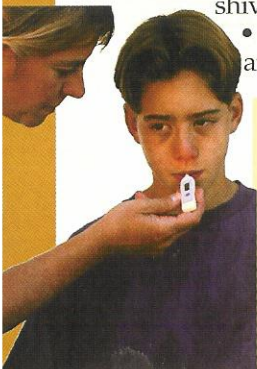
RISKS

Colds and flu may develop into something more serious, especially when a bacteria attacks on top of them.

- *otitis media* (middle ear infections) – common in children when infection spreads up the nasal passages to the middle ear
- *sinusitis* – infection spreads up to the sinuses
- *bronchitis* – infection spreads into the airways of the lungs
- *pneumonia* – infection travels down through airways into the lungs

White or slightly yellow mucus which may develop after a couple of days of cold/flu is usually a result of your immune system fighting the virus. Yellow or green mucus that develops 4–5 or more days after your initial cold/flu symptoms may be due to a bacterial infection. Ask your pharmacist or doctor.

Your cold is more likely to get worse or develop into something more serious if your immune system is not working well, e.g. if you are tired, run down, have another illness, are poorly nourished, elderly, very young, or take certain medicines.



MEDICINES

Many products which treat cold and flu symptoms contain more than one medicine to treat the range of symptoms that occur.

Medicines used include:

- decongestants – tablets, mixture, a nose spray or drops to relieve a runny or stuffy nose
- cough suppressants – to relieve a dry unproductive cough
- expectorants – to loosen phlegm and help clear it from the chest
- pain relievers – to reduce aches, pain, and fever
- antihistamines – to help dry up a runny nose and help sleep at night
- lozenges – to relieve sore throat and sometimes suppress coughing
- complementary medicines – there is evidence that garlic and echinacea are beneficial in colds and flu

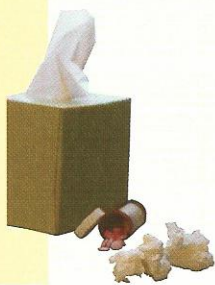
Ask your pharmacist to help you find the right product for your symptoms.

You should also talk to your pharmacist or doctor:

- about driving after taking certain cold medicines (see *Medicines and Driving* Fact Card) – read directions on medicines carefully
- before giving aspirin to children or teenagers (see *Pain Relievers* Fact Card)
- if you are taking other medicines or have any medical problems before taking a cold and flu medicine

In March each year, a new flu vaccine becomes available. It is recommended that all adults over 65 and others at a higher risk of getting flu (see under Risks) get vaccinated before the flu season starts. The flu vaccine will protect against the current flu strain but not against the common cold.

Recently, prescription medicines to treat influenza became available in Australia. If used early enough, they can reduce the time you have the flu. Ask your doctor or pharmacist.



Your **Self Care** Pharmacist

DAVID S. NOLTE PHARMACY 3049L
701 RATHDOWNE ST., NTH CARLTON 9349 1522

*Pharmacy Self Care has a strong commitment to providing current and reliable health information.
The information in this card was current at time of printing.*

SELF CARE

There is no cure for colds or flu but you can treat the symptoms. You'll still have the cold/flu but you'll feel better.

- Get plenty of rest and stay warm.
- Drink 6-8 glasses of fluid each day to keep the mucus more liquid (check with your doctor first if you have kidney or heart problems).
- Breathe in steam (ask your pharmacist about treatments to add to hot, steaming water).
- Eat a balanced, healthy diet (see Nutrition Fact Cards).
- Get plenty of sleep (see *Sleeping Problems* Fact Card).
- Try to blow your nose with one or both nostrils open so you don't force infection up into the middle ear.
- Cover a cough or sneeze with a tissue
- Wash hands regularly, especially before cooking or eating.
- Cut down on smoking – it makes your symptoms worse.
- Keep warm, but don't overheat.

Other relevant Fact Cards:

- *Medicines & Driving*
- *Sleeping Badly*
- *Pain Relievers*
- *Nutrition series*

Contact:

Your doctor – listed under Medical Practitioners in the yellow pages of the phone book

Your Self Care pharmacist. To find: (02) 6283 4777

In case of poisoning, phone the **Poisons Information Centre** on 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask your pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

Sponsored by



GlaxoSmithKline

makers of

Panadol

and

Panadol

Cold & Flu

* Registered Trade Mark. Use only as directed.

