

April 2008

Cold and Flu – Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the difference between a cold and the flu?

Although the flu and the common cold are both respiratory illnesses, they are caused by different viruses. Because they have similar symptoms, it can be difficult to tell them apart. But generally cold symptoms are much milder than flu. Common cold symptoms include:

- Sore throat
- Stuffy nose
- Runny nose
- Cough
- Mild fever

The flu, on the other hand, often causes higher fever, chills, body ache, and fatigue.

2. Why isn't there a cold vaccine?

Colds are minor infections of the throat, nose, and sinuses. Common cold can be caused by more than 250 different viruses. That is why there is not a single medicine that can treat all. Colds generally come and go with no serious complications.

3. What's the best treatment for a cold?

There is no cure for the common cold. The most important thing you can do is drink a lot of fluids to keep your body hydrated. This will help prevent another infection from setting in. Chicken soup is comforting, plus the steam helps break up nasal congestion. Ginger seems to settle an upset stomach. Over-the-counter cold medicines can offer relief from aches and fever. However, doctors no longer believe in suppressing low-grade fever, which helps the body fight off infection by impeding the growth of viruses or bacteria and by activating the immune system.

- Decongestants can help make breathing easier by shrinking swollen mucous membranes in the nose. Use for no more than two or three days.
- Saline nasal sprays can also open breathing passages and may be used freely.
- Cough preparations are not hugely effective. For minor coughs, water and fruit juices probably help the most.
- Gargling with salt water can help relieve a sore throat.

4. Should I go to the doctor or get an antibiotic?

You usually don't need a doctor or an antibiotic when you have a cold. Colds are caused by viruses. Antibiotics kill bacteria, not viruses.

5. How can I prevent a cold?

Hand washing! Both flu and cold viruses are transmitted the same way - through microscopic droplets from an infected person's respiratory system. Use an alcohol-based gel if you don't have access to water.