

## SELF-CARE FOR COLDS

More than 300 different viruses are believed to cause the common cold. It is inevitable that you will fall victim to a cold at least once, and possibly several times a year. You feel tired, can't concentrate and in general, feel lousy. More specific symptoms may be a runny or stuffed nose, a dry sore throat, muscle aches, a mild fever and a cough.



## WHAT SHOULD I DO?

### ■ For a runny or stuffed nose:

Drink plenty of water. Fluids help to loosen nasal secretions and drain sinuses.

Take a steamy shower and use a vaporizer to help loosen and drain secretions.

If nasal congestion continues to be a problem, over-the-counter decongestants (e.g., Sudafed) help to shrink swollen membranes and dry up secretions. These medications only help to relieve certain symptoms and are not cures.

### ■ For a sore throat:

Gargle with warm salt water (1/2 teaspoon of salt in 1 cup of warm water) or a half-and-half mixture of hydrogen peroxide and water several times each day.

Throat sprays such as Chloroseptic can temporarily relieve throat discomfort.

Warm liquids like weak tea or warm water usually make a sore throat feel better.

Take Tylenol (2 tablets) or Advil (400-600 mg) as directed.

You may want to avoid foods that could irritate your sore throat such as citric fruits and juices as well as acidic foods (e.g. tomatoes and tomato sauce). You should continue to keep your fluid intake up.

### ■ For a fever:

Take your temperature with a thermometer (available at any drugstore). A normal temperature for a cold is less than 101° F.

Get as much rest as possible.

Take Tylenol (2 tablets) as directed to reduce fever and help soothe muscle aches.

### ■ For a cough:

Drink plenty of water to help loosen secretions.

Use a vaporizer to moisturize the air. This is especially important during the dry winter months.

Cough drops and/or hard candies will help relieve that annoying tickle or irritation in the throat.

Take cough medicine for a continuing problem. For a productive cough (one in which phlegm is coughed up), take an expectorant cough medicine such as Guaifenesin. For a dry, hacking, or non-productive cough, you may want to try a cough preparation which contains both an expectorant and a cough suppressant.

***Be sure to read dosage, directions and warnings on all medications.***

## What shouldn't I do?

■ **For a stuffed nose:** Over the counter nasal sprays can be used but are usually not recommended for more than 2-3 days because they cause what is known as a "rebound" effect or *worsening* of nasal swelling and secretions.

■ **For a sore throat:** Smoking dries and irritates the throat, increasing the symptoms already present.

■ **For a fever:** Taking aspirin is not recommended because of the association of aspirin with a viral illness and the development of a rare but often fatal syndrome called Reye's Syndrome.

■ **For a cough:** Smoking paralyzes the cilia, (small hairs which help clean out mucus and dust from the breathing passages). If you smoke, you may "catch" more colds than the average person and have more trouble getting rid of them.

**What about antibiotics?** Good question. Colds are caused by viruses. Antibiotics do not destroy viruses. Indiscriminate use of antibiotics can increase your chances of developing an allergic reaction and, over time, can make antibiotics ineffective to treat future infections.

## When should I seek professional help?

If you have a history of rheumatic fever, asthma, diabetes, or any other chronic illness, a cold may cause more of a problem and require medical attention. You should also see a health practitioner if any of the following occur:

- A fever of less than 101° F lasts more than 3 days
- Fever rises above 101° F
- You experience chest pain or shortness of breath
- You experience facial or ear pain
- You develop swollen lymph nodes (glands) or firm, sore lumps on the sides or back of neck
- You have difficulty opening your mouth



### **What can I do to prevent colds?**

Cold viruses may be transmitted through the air onto surfaces and by hand-to-hand contact with a cold sufferer. To prevent exposure, wash your hands frequently and thoroughly. Keep hands away from eyes, nose and mouth. In addition, you may be able to ward off a severe cold by recognizing and responding to early cold symptoms such as a tickle in the throat, feeling mildly distracted, dry nose or throat, and decreased appetite. This is the time to get more rest, gargle with warm salt water and increase your fluid intake.

### **How can I tell the difference between a cold and the flu?**

Sometimes it is difficult to tell the difference but the flu or influenza is generally characterized by more rapid onset of symptoms and a high fever (102° F - 104° F). You may also experience some chest discomfort, muscle aches, and a cough that seems more prominent than with a cold. Generally the flu is gone within 3 to 5 days, while a cold may linger from 7 to 10 days and often longer. Treatment for the flu is the same as for a cold. Get as much rest as possible, use a vaporizer and drink plenty of water.

### **How do I tell the difference between a cold and an allergy?**

Again, a difficult question because many of the symptoms of allergies are similar to cold symptoms (e.g., runny nose, sneezing, headache, and watery and itchy eyes). Our bodies normally defend us against such harmful agents as bacteria and viruses to keep us well. When a person has allergies, the body fights to ward off normally harmless substances such as dust, pollens, molds and animal dander. Antihistamines will help to relieve the symptoms of allergies but may also have a side effect of drowsiness. Be sure to read the cautions on any medications. For more severe allergies, testing by an allergist may be necessary. Although Health Services does not provide allergy testing, we will give allergy injections with serum (solutions), provided by an allergist. For further information call 815-753-9760.

### **What is a “strep throat?”**

A strep throat is caused by a specific bacteria called beta-hemolytic streptococcus, group A. This bacterium is usually spread from person to person by direct contact with either acutely ill persons or healthy carriers. The typical signs and symptoms of strep throat are:

- Sore throat that is red and inflamed with visible white spots.
- Fever
- Painful swollen glands in the neck area
- Absence of cough

You should see a health care provider if you develop the above symptoms.

**Now that you are better informed about how to treat your cold, you should relax, and get plenty of rest. Call Health Services if we can be of further help.**

**Hope you feel better soon!**



**NORTHERN ILLINOIS  
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# **HUSKIE HINTS**

## **Self-care For Colds**



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