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## Colds

### Definition

A cold, or upper respiratory tract infection, is the most common cause of illness in children and adults. Most colds are caused by a virus.

### Description

More than 200 different viruses can cause the common cold, which is why it is not possible to vaccinate against the infection. A cold is a mild viral infection of the nose, throat, sinuses and upper airways. It can cause a blocked or runny nose, sneezing, a sore throat and a cough. A cold will usually resolve without medical treatment. Colds are more frequent during the winter months. This may be because people are more likely to stay indoors and be in close contact with each other.

### Children and Colds

Adults have between 2 to 4 colds a year, and children have three to eight. A child's immune system is less well developed compared to an adult's, so they are more vulnerable to infection. There is no need for bed rest if your child has a cold. Moderate activity is not harmful during a cold. Your child may not feel like eating but make sure they drink lots of fluids. Appetite will return as your child starts to feel better.

Cough and cold medicines **should not** be given to children under 6 years of age. Cough and cold medicines should only be given to children aged 6 to 11 years on the advice of a Doctor, Pharmacist or Nurse Practitioner. There are potential risks associated with these products for children. There are no proven benefits in using cough and cold medicines in children.

### Treatment options

There is no cure for the common cold and in most cases you will be able to manage the symptoms of cold without the need for medication. Over-the-counter cough and cold medicines should not be given to children. Decongestants and cough medicines will not help your child to recover more quickly and may cause side effects. Follow these Self-Care Techniques;

- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Get plenty of rest and resume normal activities when you feel well enough

### Suggested solutions

#### General

- » Paracetamol or ibuprofen
- » Germicidal handwash

#### Natural

- » Vitamin C
- » Zinc

#### Diet

- » Increase fluids, fruits/vegetables



- Eat healthily: a low-fat, high-fibre diet is recommended, including plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables (five portions a day).
  - Vapour rubs can help to soothe the symptoms of a cold in babies and young children. Apply the rub to your child's chest and back. Don't apply it to their nostrils because this could cause pain and breathing difficulties.
  - Menthol lozenges may help to relieve the symptoms of a sore throat.
  - Nasal saline drops or sprays can help relieve the symptoms of nasal congestion in babies and young children.
  - Gargling with salt water can sometimes help to relieve the symptoms of a sore throat and nasal congestion.
  - Child-formula paracetamol or ibuprofen may be used to help relieve pain and fever in children.
- See your Doctor if symptoms do not resolve within 2 weeks or if a patient

- Refuses to drink fluids
- Vomits frequently
- Complains of intense headache
- Is pale and sleepy
- Has difficulty breathing
- Has a high fever that does not respond to paracetamol
- Shows no improvement in 48 hours
- Shows any other signs that you are worried about.

## **Prevention**

The viruses that cause colds are spread by sneezing, coughing and hand contact. You can reduce the risk of spreading the common cold by doing the following;

- Wash your hands regularly and thoroughly, particularly after touching your nose or mouth and before handling food
- Always sneeze and cough into tissues as this will help to contain the virus; throw away used tissues immediately and wash your hands
- Clean surfaces regularly to keep them free of germs
- Avoid sharing cups, plates, cutlery and kitchen utensils
- Use disposable paper towels to dry your hands and face, rather than shared towels. As with tissues, always dispose of the paper towels after you have finished using them..

## **Vitamins/minerals/herbs**

Supplements may only be of value if dietary intake is inadequate.

- Vitamin C is associated with healthy immune function.
- Zinc supports immune function and may have antiviral effects.
- Echinacea can reduce the duration of cold symptoms and assist in prevention of colds.
- Garlic is reputed to have anti-bacterial properties, along with immune enhancing activity.
- Astragalus may assist in preventing the common cold.

## **Aromatherapy**

The listed essential oils are suggested for the temporary relief of the symptoms of Colds. The most specific oils are shown in capitals.

Aniseed, Basil, Citronella, EUCALYPTUS, Grapefruit, Lavender, Lemon, Lime, Myrrh, Orange, Peppermint, PINE, TEA TREE, THYME.

## **Application**

MASSAGE: Blend any single listed essential oil or combination of several essential oils - 5 drops (total) to 10mL (1/3 fl oz) vegetable carrier oil such as Sweet Almond, Apricot Kernel. Apply twice daily to chest, upper back and throat with gentle massage.

**STEAM INHALATION:** In a bowl containing one litre of steaming water, add 5 drops (total) of essential oil; cover head with towel and inhale while leaning over bowl. Keep eyes closed.

**VAPORISATION:** Add 5 drops (total) single essential oil or combination of several essential oils listed to water in oil burner.

### **Pharmacist's advice**

Ask your Pharmacist for advice.

- 1) Follow the Self-Care Techniques under Treatment Options.
- 2) Ask your Pharmacist for advice about relieving the symptoms of a cold.
- 3) Your Pharmacy stocks a range of gargles and lozenges to relieve the symptom of sore throat.
- 4) If your child has a cold and requires pain relief, ask your Pharmacist for advice. Your Pharmacist can also describe how to use saline nasal drops.
- 5) Reduce or stop smoking. Ask your Pharmacist about anti-smoking products
- 6) Use a germicidal handwash to prevent spreading the virus.
- 7) Cough or sneeze into a tissue to contain the virus and dispose of it immediately. Your Pharmacist stocks a range of tissues.
- 8) Consider some nutritional supplements if the dietary vitamin intake is inadequate.

**Aspirin should not be given to children under 16 years of age unless specified by a Doctor.**

DISCLAIMER : This information is an educational aid only. It is not intended to replace medical advice for individual conditions or treatments. Talk to your doctor, pharmacist, nurse or naturopath before following any medical regimen to see whether it is safe and effective for you.