

Colds

What causes colds? Colds are caused by a virus. There are several viruses that cause colds, but they all give similar symptoms. When you have a cold you may have:

- blocked / runny nose
- headache
- fever
- aching body
- earache
- sore throat
- cough

In fact, it is common to get more than one symptom when you have a cold, and you may have all of the above at one time or another during a cold infection. People often say they have "flu" when they have a cold. It can sometimes be hard to tell the difference. However, the Flu (influenza) virus makes people feel much more ill - so ill they may not be able to look after themselves, whereas the cold virus is less severe.

What should I do?

If you have a cold, it's important to

- drink plenty of fluids
- rest when you are tired
- reduce cigarettes, tea and coffee (they dry your throat more)
- take *regular* doses of a good painkiller
 - Paracetamol and Ibuprofen are good - and cheap
 - Soluble Aspirin gargles are good for sore throats - and cheap
 - always read the label of medicines you buy
 - and **take the dose regularly** until you're better - don't wait for the pain to come back before the next dose, take it as advised on the packet
- some people find decongestants helpful
 - they're available from all pharmacies and many other shops
 - if you are taking other medicines, always read the label
- many people find steam helpful
 - either use plain water, or add a menthol preparation to boiling water
 - make a "steam tent" with a tea-towel over your head
 - spend several minutes taking slow, deep breaths
 - repeat it every hour or two, to clear your nose and head

Most colds last between a day and a week - so it's important to continue looking after yourself.

Should I see the doctor? Because antibiotics don't work for colds, there is usually no point in seeing the doctor or nurse. All they are able to do for most patients is give the above advice. However, it is worth phoning for advice if you have the following:

- very high fever, not reduced by Paracetamol and Ibuprofen
- difficulty breathing
- difficulty swallowing drinks
- you feel very ill

Further links

- www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk - 24 hour advice