

Upper Respiratory Tract Infection (Common Cold)



- Respiratory tract infections are most often caused by viruses.
- They are generally self-limited, but often last for 10-12 days.
- Coughs related to these infections can last 3-4 weeks.
- Self-limited infections can be treated without seeing a medical provider.
- Antibiotics are not effective for viral infections

Symptoms:

- Develop slowly over 2-4 days
- Sore throat
- Nasal congestion
- Runny nose
- Cough
- Fever up to 102 degrees Fahrenheit
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Watery eyes

Self-care:

- Rest
- Drink plenty of non-alcoholic fluids
- Use saline nose drops to loosen mucus
- Use Ibuprofen (Advil®) 600 mg every 6-8 hours or Acetaminophen (Tylenol®) 650 mg every 6 hours as needed to reduce fever or discomfort
- Use Oral Decongestants (Phenylephrine) for short-term relief of nasal congestion
- Use Nasal Decongestant (Oxymetazoline) for short-term relief of nasal congestion (do not use for more than 3 days)
- Gargle with salt water and use throat sprays/lozenges for throat pain
- Use heated, humidified air (if you do not have a humidifier try taking a hot shower)

Limit spread to others:

- Wash hands frequently
- Cover coughs and sneezes using the crook of your elbow

When to seek care from a medical provider:

- Fever over 102 degrees Fahrenheit for more than 3 days
- For symptoms that last over 10 days and are getting worse instead of better
- Shortness of breath/wheezing
- Pain/pressure in your chest
- Severe sinus pain
- Very swollen glands in the neck or jaw
- Significant sore throat lasting more than 1 week

Online symptoms checker:

- <http://familydoctor.org/familydoctor/en/health-tools/search-by-symptom/cold-flu.html>

Other resources:

- <http://familydoctor.org/familydoctor/en/diseases-conditions/colds-and-the-flu.printerview.all.html>
- <http://www.cdc.gov/features/rhinoviruses/index.html>