

Information for managing seasonal viral illness (“Cold & Flu”)



Viral illnesses. Viruses are very small microbes that infect the cells of your body (some people call them “germs” or “bugs”). There are lots of different viruses you can catch, so you may get different symptoms based on which one you have and how your body fights back against it.



Self-care works best. In most cases, the best way to manage a seasonal viral illness is to let it “run its course”. That means, get plenty of rest and do the things listed below to feel better.



Antibiotics are not used for illnesses caused by viral infection. This type of medicine is used to kill bacteria. Antibiotics do not work on viruses so will not help your recovery.

Did you know?

More than 200 different viruses can cause a cold, but the most common type is called rhinovirus. Colds are mostly spread by breathing in droplets that come from other people sneezing or coughing.

| Common viral symptoms | Self-care management advice | Avoid |
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| Fatigue (feeling really tired) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rest; take time off work or school, if possible Only do what you feel up to. It's okay to let other household members help you | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Don't do heavy exercise or other busy activities that wear you out until you feel well again |
| Fever (feeling hot or high temperature on a thermometer) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rest and drink plenty of water or other fluids Use a cool cloth to wash your face, hands and neck Make the house a comfortable temperature and open windows for ventilation (breeze) – but make sure you don't get too cold Take paracetamol or ibuprofen, if needed* | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Don't use heavy clothing/bedding, hot water bottles, electric blankets <div style="border: 1px solid orange; padding: 5px; background-color: #fff9e6;"> Talk to your GP if body temperature is $\geq 40^{\circ}\text{C}$ in an adult or $\geq 39^{\circ}\text{C}$ in a child or older person </div> |
| Sore throat Cough | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Try sucking on a spoon of honey or sipping a hot drink Gargling salt water, using a throat spray or lozenges can help with sore throats Some people find cough syrup medicines* can help, but they work about the same as the suggestions above | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Don't lie on your back if you have a cough; leaning forward while sitting or standing can help you breathe more easily if you are feeling uncomfortable |
| Runny or blocked nose | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use saline nose drops or a spray “Decongestant” medicines from your pharmacy may be helpful for a few days* Some people find steam inhalation makes them feel better for a short time, but you have to be careful not to burn yourself (N.B. Steam does not kill viruses) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Don't use decongestants for longer than seven days Don't use steam inhalation for children |
| Headache or muscle aches or other types of pain | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some people find a bath is soothing or use a heat pack Take paracetamol or ibuprofen, if needed* | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoid taking too much paracetamol or ibuprofen; check the recommended maximum daily dose and remember that some other “cold & flu” treatments may already have these medicines in them so don't double up |
| Nausea (feeling sick) and vomiting Diarrhoea | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have regular small sips of fluid or try sucking on ice cubes if you're having trouble keeping solids down; eating bland foods may help, e.g. crackers, toast Food or drink that contains ginger may help settle nausea If you have vomiting or diarrhoea for more than one or two days, talk to your doctor or pharmacy about drinks you can make at home, buy or be prescribed (oral rehydration solution) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Don't stop drinking fluids (even if you feel unwell) Drinks with high sugar content can make diarrhoea worse |

Get help if things get worse

In most cases you will get better within ten days. Your cough may last a bit longer than this.



Seek further advice from your general practice or Healthline (0800 611 116) if you start to feel a lot worse or are not getting better after about a week



Call 111 or go to the hospital if you:

- Have difficulty breathing or severe chest pain
- Feel confused or have difficulty thinking clearly
- Feel faint, pass out, have difficulty waking up
- Cough up a large amount of blood
- Have blue lips/tongue or a significant skin rash
- Have severe shaking, chills or fever that hasn't improved with the self-care advice listed above

* Talk to your local pharmacy or general practice if you need more advice about the medicines that you can take

Keep well and stop the spread

- Stay home, keep warm and rest, if possible
- Cover your mouth with a tissue or the inside of your elbow when coughing or sneezing
- Wash hands often and thoroughly (e.g. 20 seconds with soap) and dry them well
- Avoid sharing personal items
- Eat healthy foods
- Avoid smoking or being around someone who smokes
- Get annual influenza vaccinations – for some people this may be free. Keep up to date with COVID-19 vaccinations, including boosters.

Have you done a COVID-19 test?

COVID-19 is caused by a virus too, and has many of the same symptoms as cold & flu

