

Coughs and colds

Common colds are caused by infections of your respiratory tract such as the mouth, nose and throat and most of the colds are viral in nature so antibiotics will not be effective in clearing the cold. It is very common to develop a cold and most people can recover from it within 7 to 10 days at home.

How coughs & colds spread

An infected person can spread the virus if they cough, sneeze or talk. You can also catch a cold if you use any contaminated objects and then touch your eyes, nose and mouth afterwards.

What are the signs & symptoms?

When you have a cold, you may have these symptoms:

- Coughs (may persist for 2-3 weeks after your other symptoms have gone)
- Sore throat
- Blocked, stuffy or runny nose
- Fatigue
- Headaches
- Sneezing
- Body aches
- Feeling unwell
- Loss of appetite

Treating coughs & colds

A common cold will naturally clear after 7-10 days as your immune system clears the infection. As antibiotics treat bacterial infections, they are not effective at treating the common cold. You can however ease your symptoms with the following:

- Paracetamol or ibuprofen may be taken to ease pain, aches and headaches
- Please follow the instructions carefully and do not take more than the advised dose
- Lozenges may be taken to ease sore throats
- Drink plenty of water to stay hydrated
- Rest well and avoid strenuous activities
- Decongestant tablets or nasal sprays may be taken but be careful in checking the ingredients such as paracetamol, so you don't take too much

Preventing coughs & colds

To reduce the risks of catching or spreading a cold, you can:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitisers
- Keep a safe distance from people with colds

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth after touching objects used by someone who has a cold
- Eat a balanced diet and exercise often
- Disinfect objects often
- Cover your cough and sneeze into a tissue or into the bend of your elbow
- Wear a face mask or covering

When to seek further help

You should seek a GP or call 111 if you experience the following:

- Your symptoms do not improve after 3 weeks
- Your symptoms suddenly get worse
- You have a very high temperature
- You develop a shortness of breath or have trouble breathing and chest pains
- You suddenly cough up blood
- You have difficulty swallowing
- Any other symptoms not listed or very severe

If you struggle to breathe, go to A&E or call 999 immediately for urgent treatment.

References:

- <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/common-cold/>
- <https://patient.info/chest-lungs/cough-leaflet/coughs-and-colds-in-children>