

PHC

Winter Coughs and Colds – the facts and how to avoid catching them!

Colds



With more than 200 subtly different types of cold virus variants around all the time and at least three flu viruses, it is hardly surprising that we succumb to a winter cold at some point during the winter months. The virus is transmitted either by direct inhalation (when someone sneezes, a microscopic droplet finds its way into your mouth or nose), or touch.

A good strong sneeze can send 100,000 virus-containing droplets around 3.5 metres into the air, and just one of those droplets can survive for up to 48 hours on a doorknob, TV remote control, desk, keyboard or a handrail, to be picked up when you touch it.

If you put your hands close to your nose, eyes or mouth, the virus can swiftly enter your body, using your cells as hosts to make thousands of copies of itself. This rapid replication — or more specifically your body's reaction to it — is what triggers classic cold symptoms.

During the first few days of your cold, you are unlikely to know you have been infected – but this is when you are at your most infectious.

Innovative ways to avoid catching colds.....



- One theory why we catch colds and flu more in winter is that our nose is colder which lowers its resistance to infection, so if it's really cold, place a scarf over your nose to keep it warm.
- Don't shake hands – research has shown shaking hands transmits ten to 20 times more bugs between people than a 'fist bump'. Shaking lasts longer and involves a larger surface area and those with the firmest grip transmit the most bacteria.
- Wash clothes on a hot cycle - the flu virus can survive a 40c wash, so if someone in the family is affected, wash their clothes, towels and bedding on a hot wash or try an Anti-bacterial Laundry Cleanser.
- Cut down on sugar - studies have found that when volunteers consumed 100g of sugar, immune cells called phagocytes consumed fewer bacteria than normal for up to five hours. Therefore, cutting back on sugar could give your immune cells a better chance.
- Get eight hours' sleep - less than seven hours' sleep a night makes you three times more likely to catch a cold than someone who gets eight hours, research suggests. It also suggests that Disturbed sleep, or lack of sleep, interferes with the workings of an immunity gene called TLR-9.

- Observe the two-seat rule - According to researchers at the Australian National University in Canberra, your risk of catching flu dramatically increases if you sit within two seats in any direction of someone infected. If you see anyone sniffing or coughing and can move seats, it might be worth doing it. If you can't move, open windows. Research found spending 90 minutes in a car with someone who has flu gives a 99.9 per cent chance of catching the virus. But the risk falls to 20 per cent if you open windows.
- Wash your hands - with soap and water when you come in from outside and after visiting the WC.
- Exercise - but only moderately - gentle or moderate exercise can stimulate the immune system, however, research from Loughborough University found that about 90 minutes of high-intensity exercise causes the release of stress hormones and anti-inflammatory molecules that can depress immunity, leaving you vulnerable to colds and flu.
- Take vitamin D supplements - research found that low levels of vitamin D can interfere with bacteria-fighting molecules called hCAP-18 that stimulate immune cells. If you're deficient, your risk of catching colds and flu raises by at least a third. If you do take a supplement, try vitamin D3, the type of vitamin D that's most easily absorbed by your body.
- Catch It - Germs spread easily. Always carry tissues and use them to catch your cough or sneeze. Then Bin It - Germs can live for several hours on tissues. Dispose of your tissue as soon as possible

How to treat coughs, colds and influenza



Try to rest, eat well, avoid stress and keep hydrated.

If you have a fever, you may need extra fluids. You could also take Paracetamol to treat fever and pain, or inhale steam with a decongestant in to help clear a blocked nose.

In most cases, antibiotics (which are used to treat bacterial infections) aren't necessary. Colds and flu, and most coughs, are caused by viruses, so antibiotics can't help. Minor bacterial infections will also be fought off by natural immunity, however if you are worried seek advice from NHS 111.

When to see a doctor



While most bugs will run their course without doing any real harm, there are certain cases when you or your child should see a GP.

These include:

- if you or your child have a chronic condition – such as asthma, diabetes or heart disease
- if you have a very high temperature and feel ill – for example, if you also have an unusually severe headache or abdominal pain
- if your child is vomiting but does not have diarrhoea, or has a rash in addition to the fever
- if your child stops drinking and is unusually lethargic
- if your child's fever doesn't respond to paracetamol or ibuprofen

Babies, as well as older and frailer people, should get help if they're unwell.