Upper Respiratory Infection (URI) in Adults

An Upper Respiratory Infection (URI) is another name for the **common cold**. A cold is caused by a virus that can settle in your nose, throat or lungs. This causes a runny or stuffy nose and sneezing. You may also have a sore throat, cough, headache, fever and muscle aches. Different cold viruses last different lengths of time, but the average time is 2 to 14 days.

**Treatment**

There is no cure for the common cold. **Antibiotics may be used to treat signs of a secondary infection, but they do not treat the cold virus.** Try these tips to keep yourself comfortable:

- Get plenty of rest.
- Drink plenty of fluids, at least 8 large glasses of fluid a day. Good fluid choices are water, fruit juices high in Vitamin C, tea, gelatin, or broths and soups. These help to keep mucus thin and ease congestion.
- Use salt water gargle, cough drops or throat sprays to relieve throat pain. Mix ¼ to ½ teaspoon of salt in 1 cup of warm water for a salt water gargle solution.
- Use petroleum jelly or lip balm around lips and nose to prevent chapping.
- Use saline nose drops or spray to help ease congestion.

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Learn more about your health care.
Over the Counter (OTC) Medicines:
Take over the counter medicines as needed to ease your signs.

- **Read labels carefully.**
- Use a product that treats only the signs that you have. Ask your pharmacist for recommendations. Be sure to ask about possible interactions with other medicines you are taking.
- Common medicines used to treat signs of a cold include:
  - **Antihistamines** that dry secretions in your nose and lungs. Some of these may cause you to feel drowsy. Talk to your pharmacist before use if you have glaucoma or an enlarged prostate.
    
    Names of some medicines in this group include:
    - Diphenhydramine
    - Brompheniramine
    - Chlorpheniramine
    - Clemastine
  - **Decongestants** that tighten blood vessels in your nose to decrease stuffiness and pressure. Use nasal spray decongestants for up to three days only. Longer use can make congestion worse. Talk to your pharmacist before use if you have high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes or an enlarged prostate.
    
    Names of some medicines in this group include:
    - Pseudoephedrine – kept behind the counter and requires identification to purchase in limited quantities because it can be used to make illegal drugs
    - Phenylephrine
    - Oxymetazoline nasal spray
  - **Cough suppressant**, also called antitussive, such as dextromethorphan. This medicine decreases your reflex and sensitivity to cough. This medicine may be kept behind the pharmacy counter for purchase.
  - **Expectorant**, sometimes called mucolytic, such as guaifenesin. This medicine thins mucus secretions in the lungs to make it easier for you to cough up and out.

- **Cold and cough medicines often contain more than one type of medicine.** Ask the pharmacist for help to confirm that you are not using more than one product with the same or similar ingredient. For example, some cold and cough medicines have acetaminophen or ibuprofen in them to help lower a fever or ease muscle aches. Do not take extra acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) if the cold or cough medicine has it as an ingredient. Too much medicine could be harmful.
• Take the correct dose as listed on the package. Do not take more than recommended.

**Use a Humidifier:**
A cool mist humidifier can make breathing easier by thinning mucus. Do not use a steam humidifier as hot water can cause burns if spilled.

• Place the humidifier a few feet from the bed. **Drain and clean each day with soap and water to prevent bacteria and mold from growing.**
• Indoor humidity should not be above 50%. Stop using the humidifier if you notice moisture on windows, walls or pictures.
• You do not need to add any medicine to the humidifier.
• If you cannot get a humidifier, place a pan of water next to heating vents and refill the water level daily. The water will evaporate and add moisture to the room.

See a doctor for care if you have any signs that give you concern, get worse or last more than 10 days.

**How to prevent the spread of colds**

• Wash your hands with soap and water or use alcohol based hand sanitizer often. Dry hands wet from washing with soap on a paper towel instead of cloth towel.
• Cough or sneeze into your elbow to avoid spreading germs.
• Wipe down common surfaces, such as door knobs and faucet handles, with a disinfectant spray.
• Do not share cups or utensils.

[Image: Cough and sneeze into your elbow]

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have any questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.