

NATURAL SUPPORT FOR VIRAL RESPIRATORY INFECTIONS

Viral respiratory infections are common and usually run a benign, self-limited course of about 5 to 10 days. There is evidence that 'colds' often settle in the chest as bronchitis or in the sinuses as a sinusitis in many cases. Thus the majority of **bronchitis** and **sinusitis** of less than 10 days duration is **usually viral** rather than bacterial (in non-smoking adults), and does **not** respond to antibiotics.

What you can do to help your body heal:

The most important self-care is to **GET PLENTY OF REST**: don't work if you are tired. Do your best to avoid excess stress and responsibilities.

Eat a **prudent diet** with plenty of fresh vegetables. Garlic and onions have some anti-viral properties, though it is not clear that they help treat systemic viruses. **Avoid eating lots of sugar or refined carbohydrates** (starches) such as white bread or pasta, pastries or candies. Drink plenty of **fluids** (e.g. water, herbal teas containing horehound, slippery elm or marshmallow such as Throat-Coat™ by Traditional Medicinals). Ensure adequate Vitamin D₃ nutrition, e.g. by taking 1000 to 2000 units/day during the 'Vitamin D winter' from October to March since Vitamin D deficiency is common (especially in the winter) and may predispose to infections. See Vitamin D handout for details.

Use a **nasal irrigation** cup (e.g. Narial cup or Netti pot) to flush the mucous out of your nose several times a day.

If you want to try some supplements, you can use the following that are initialed by your physician (none of these are *proven* to help, though they have limited evidence of benefit):

_____ **Vitamin C**: 500 mg two to four times a day. (for children age 2 to 12, give half this dose). If diarrhea or stomach upset is a problem, try an enteric coated formulation or lower the dose. Added bioflavonoids may also be helpful.

_____ **Zinc lozenges**: Follow the directions on the bottle. Do not use longer than 3 to 5 days, since excess zinc can be toxic and interfere with other nutrient absorption.

There have been a few reports of loss of sense of smell with zinc *nasal* formulations, but whether this was actually the cause is unknown.

_____ **Echinacea** - an herb that appears to stimulate the immune system. Start at the earliest sign of a viral infection – the earlier the better. A good brand is Echinaforce – the dose is 1 to 2 tablets on the tongue up to 5 times a day. The higher dose range appears to be more effective. Use about half the dose in children older than age 2 years. Expect a tingling sensation on the tongue. Avoid taking Echinacea for longer than a few weeks, or if you have a wasting illness such as AIDS or an autoimmune disorder such as lupus. People

severely allergic to chrysanthemum family of flowers probably should not take this medication.

If you maintain a **body-mind integration practice** such as Yoga, Tai Chi or Meditation, now is a good time to practice it as your energy level allows. Re-balancing emotional energy can sometimes help ward off or shorten an infection.

Frequently asked questions:

Q: My phlegm is green-yellow sometimes. Doesn't this indicate I have a bacterial infection that would respond to an antibiotic?

A: No it doesn't necessarily. Yellow-green phlegm is simply a sign of inflammation, which can occur with both bacterial *and* viral infections.

Q: Won't an antibiotic at least help a little? Why can't I take an antibiotic to help prevent the illness from turning into a bacterial infection?

A: Antibiotics have **zero** effect on viruses. Prescribing antibiotics 'just in case' to prevent the illness from turning into a bacterial infection is not routinely warranted and exposes the patient to possible side effects, increased expense and drives increased bacterial resistance to antibiotics. The Center for Disease Control strongly recommends against doing so.

Q: My 'cold' moved into my chest and now I am coughing a lot. Doesn't this mean I now have developed bronchitis & need antibiotics?

A: Viral respiratory infections often will lead to this pattern of later chest congestion & cough, and do **not** need antibiotics in the vast majority of healthy adults. Sometimes the cough will 'drag on' for a few weeks ('post-viral cough'). If you have a persistent fever, shortness of breath, you smoke or have underlying lung disease, have a suppressed immune system, have pus-laden phlegm or have been exposed to severe infectious agents or feel unusually sick, be sure to get re-evaluated by your physician.

Q: Which over-the counter (OTC) medications are important to take for a 'cold'?

A: No cold remedy changes the natural course of viral respiratory infections. That is, you won't get better any faster if you take them – they just help comfort.

-Cough is a natural mechanism by which the lungs 'clean house', and therefore there is little reason to interfere with this process. If the cough is not 'doing its job' of producing phlegm and is just secondary to irritation and preventing you from rest, then it may make sense to treat it. Children in general should avoid OTC cold preparations because of infrequent but possibly severe side effects. Some popular brands (be sure to follow directions & precautions on bottle, get ok from Obstetrician first if pregnant or breastfeeding):

_____ Robitussin DM (generic for all these are ok) helps suppress cough.

_____ Robitussin Cough & Cold adds a decongestant if stuffiness or post-nasal drip is a problem.

_____ Robitussin PM Cough & Cold adds an antihistamine to help sleep & any allergic component.

_____ Robitussin Cough Drops for irritated throat – related cough
_____ Delsym has 30 mg dextromethorphan/5 ml and can be used as a long-acting cough suppressant overnight.
_____ Various natural cough remedies with combinations of Menthol, Wild cherry, Slippery elm, Horehound, Honey, etc can also soothe coughs.

Q. When is it necessary to see a doctor if one has a 'cold'?

A: Generally you can take care of this problem fine by yourself. However, if the symptoms are unusually severe, you have an underlying illness that makes you more susceptible to infections & their complications, or your symptoms take a turn for the worse (such as a sudden new fever several days into the illness) or they persist beyond a couple weeks, then be sure to see your doctor.

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