

COLDS AND THE FLU: TIPS ON FEELING BETTER

A cold and the flu cause many of the same symptoms. A cold is generally mild, while the flu tends to be more severe.

A cold often starts with feeling tired, sneezing, coughing and a runny nose. You may not have a fever or you may run a low fever – just one or two degrees above normal. You may also have muscle aches, a scratchy or sore throat, watery eyes and a headache.

The flu starts suddenly and hits hard. You'll probably feel weak and tired, and have a fever, dry cough, runny nose, chills, muscle aches, severe headache, eye pain and a sore throat. It usually takes longer to get over the flu than a cold.

What causes colds and the flu?

Viruses. Over 100 different viruses can cause colds, but not as many cause the flu. That's why there is a vaccine for flu but not for colds.

What can I do to feel better?

There's no cure for a cold or the flu. Antibiotics don't work against viruses. All you can do to feel better is treat your symptoms while your body fights off the virus.

- Stay home and rest, especially while you have a fever.
- Stop smoking and avoid secondhand smoke, which can make symptoms worse.
- Drink plenty of fluids like water, fruit juices and clear soups. Fluids help loosen mucus. Fluids are also important if you have a fever because fever can dry up your body's fluids which can lead to dehydration.
- Gargle with warm salt water a few times a day to relieve a sore throat. Throat sprays or lozenges may also help relieve the pain.
- Use saline (salt water) nose drops to help loosen mucus and moisten the tender skin in your nose.

Should I take medicine for a cold or the flu?

No medicine can cure a cold or the flu, it may however, help relieve some of the symptoms. Always check with your doctor before giving any medicine to children. Many cold and flu products are available without a prescription. Most contain analgesics (to relieve aches and pains and reduce fever), antitussives (to relieve coughing), expectorants (to help thin mucus so it can be coughed up more easily), and/or oral decongestants (to shrink the nasal passages and reduce congestion.)

In most cases, you don't need to see your doctor when you have a cold or the flu. However, if your symptoms persist or become more severe, call your health care provider.

Source: familydoctor.org