

The common cold

This is a short guide for a **the common cold**

The **common cold** is a Mild viral infection that can cause symptoms, including a blocked and then runny nose, sneezing, cough, a sore throat, a slightly raised body temperature (fever) up to 39°C and feeling generally unwell.

We can catch a **cold** by either breathing in droplets of fluid containing the **cold** virus (when someone sneezes), or by touching something that someone has sneezed on, and then touching our mouth or nose

Colds are harmless infections that in the vast majority of cases get better by themselves without any complications.

Colds are very common, and adults get an average of two to four **colds** a year.

While the symptoms are unpleasant, the common cold is harmless. Complications, such as chest, ear and other infections, are rare.

Most **colds** get better on their own without treatment. Antibiotics are ineffective for treating the common **cold** and may cause side effects.

In adults and older children, **cold** symptoms last for about a week and a half, and in younger children for up to two weeks. Symptoms are usually worst in the first two to three days, before they gradually start to improve. Coughs may last up to three weeks.

We have no cure for the common **cold**. But while our bodies fight the infection, there are various ways of relieving our symptoms:

- Get some rest until you feel better – we usually know when we're well enough to return to normal activities.
- Eat healthily, including at least five portions of fruit and vegetables every day.
- Drink plenty of fluids to replace those lost from sweating and a runny nose.
- Paracetamol, ibuprofen or aspirin can help reduce the symptoms of a cold. Avoid giving aspirin to children under the age of 16 and follow the manufacturer's instructions. Talk to your pharmacist about supplements that may help ease your symptoms.

When should I seek medical help?

Most **colds** are not serious and get better by themselves. Contact your GP surgery for urgent advice if you notice one or more of the following:

- You develop a high temperature (above 39°C or 102.2°F), which can be a sign of a more serious type of infection;
- You're feeling confused or disorientated;
- You notice a sharp pain in your chest;
- You cough up blood-stained phlegm (thick mucus);
- You find it difficult to breathe;
- You notice a marked swelling of the glands in your neck and/or armpits;
- Your symptoms last longer than three weeks.