**[Cold remedies: What works, What doesn't, What can't hurt](https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/common-cold/in-depth/cold-remedies/art-20046403)**

Nothing can cure a cold, but there are some remedies that might help ease your symptoms and keep you from feeling so miserable. If you catch a cold, you can expect to be sick for one to two weeks. That doesn't mean you have to be miserable. Besides getting enough rest, these remedies might help you feel better.

**Cold Remedies: What Works**

**Stay hydrated.** Water, juice, clear broth, and tea or warm lemon water with honey helps loosen congestion and prevents dehydration. Avoid alcohol, coffee and caffeinated sodas, which can make dehydration worse.

**Rest.** Your body needs to heal.

**Soothe a sore throat.** A saltwater gargle (1/2-1 teaspoon salt dissolved in 8 ounces of warm water) can temporarily relieve a sore or scratchy throat. You can also try ice chips, sore throat sprays, lozenges, and honey (Soothes sore throat, natural cough suppressant, local honey may decrease seasonal allergy symptoms. Try a teaspoon at bedtime.)

**Combat stuffiness.** Over-the-counter saline nasal drops and sprays can help relieve stuffiness and congestion. Vicks Rub can **e**ase nasal and chest congestion, relieve headaches, and suppress cough. A Neti-Pot is a container with a spout designed for nasal rinsing that helps thin and remove nasal secretions.

**Relieve pain.**  For children older than 6 months, give either acetaminophen or ibuprofen. Ask your child's doctor for the correct dose for your child's age and weight. Adults can take acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil) Though aspirin is approved for use in children older than age 3, children and teenagers recovering from chickenpox or flu-like symptoms should never take aspirin. This is because aspirin has been linked to Reye's syndrome, a rare but potentially life-threatening condition, in such children.

**Sip warm liquids.** A cold remedy used in many cultures, taking in warm liquids, such as chicken soup, tea, or warm juice, might be soothing and might ease congestion by increasing mucus flow.

**Add moisture to the air.** A cool mist vaporizer or humidifier can add moisture to your home, which might help loosen congestion. Change the water daily, and clean the unit according to the manufacturer's instructions.

**Try over-the-counter (OTC) cold and cough medications.** For adults and children older than 5, OTC decongestants, antihistamines and pain relievers might offer some symptom relief. However, they won't prevent a cold or shorten its duration, and most have some side effects. \*\*Take medications only as directed. Some cold remedies contain multiple ingredients, such as a decongestant plus a pain reliever, so read the labels of cold medications you take to make sure you're not taking too much of any medication. Avoid sprays such as Afrin which will cause rebound congestion after a few days of use. \*\*

**Cold remedies that don't work**

**Antibiotics.** These attack bacteria, but they're no help against cold viruses. Avoid asking your doctor for antibiotics for a cold or using old antibiotics you have on hand. You won't get well any faster, and inappropriate use of antibiotics contributes to the serious and growing problem of antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

**Cold remedies with conflicting evidence**

**Vitamin C.** It appears that for the most part taking vitamin C won't help the average person prevent colds. However, taking vitamin C before the onset of cold symptoms may shorten the duration of symptoms.

**Echinacea.** Study results on whether echinacea prevents or shortens colds are mixed. Some studies show no benefit. Others show some reduction in the severity and duration of cold symptoms when taken in the early stages of a cold. Echinacea seems to be most effective if you take it when you notice cold symptoms and continue it for seven to 10 days. It appears to be safe for healthy adults, but it can interact with many drugs. Check with your doctor before taking echinacea or any other supplement.

**Zinc.**  Some studies show that zinc reduces the length of a cold by, especially when taken within 24 hours of the first signs and symptoms of a cold. Some studies also show that taking zinc regularly might reduce the number of colds each year, the number of missed school days, and the amount of antibiotics required in otherwise healthy children. Zinc also has potentially harmful side effects. Talk to your doctor before considering the use of zinc to prevent or reduce the length of colds.

**Take care of yourself**

Although usually minor, colds can make you feel miserable. It's tempting to try the latest remedy, but the best thing you can do is take care of yourself. Rest, drink fluids and keep the air around you moist. Remember to wash your hands frequently.