

Common Cold & Flu-like Illness

Symptoms may include:

- ▶ A blocked nose or a runny nose, and sneezing.
- ▶ Feeling generally unwell and tired.
- ▶ Fever, sore throat, hoarseness and cough.
- ▶ Dulled hearing or mild earache (due to build-up of mucus behind the eardrums).

Symptoms typically peak after 2-3 days and then gradually ease off. Symptoms have usually gone within a week but, in some cases, they can take up to three weeks to clear completely.

Do I need an antibiotic?

Most common colds & flu-like illnesses are caused by a viral infection.

Antibiotics **DO NOT** kill viruses.

So you **DO NOT** need an antibiotic for most common colds & flu-like illnesses.

In people who are normally well, your own immune system will usually clear the infection.

Antibiotics may cause side-effects such as thrush, diarrhoea, rash and stomach upsets, so they should not be taken unnecessarily. Unnecessary use of some antibiotics has caused them to become less effective.

Treatment for the Common Cold & Flu-like Illnesses

Treatment options to relieve symptoms whilst waiting for your immune system to clear the infection.	
No treatment	Symptoms are often mild and you will usually get better soon without any treatment.
Pain & fever relief	Take paracetamol or ibuprofen regularly. Do not take any more than the recommended dose.
Fluids	Drink plenty of fluids such as water and fruit-juices to avoid dehydration. Avoid food and drink that may irritate a sore throat (e.g. avoid hot drinks).
Steam inhalation	Inhaling steam from a shower may help clear a stuffed up nose. This may be helpful before bedtime. Care should be taken to avoid any risk of scalding.
Over-the-counter medicines	Ask your community pharmacist for advice.

What symptoms should I look out for?

Consult a doctor if symptoms do not start to ease within a few days, or if you suspect that a complication is developing:

- ▶ Fever, chest pains or headache that becomes worse or severe.
- ▶ Fast breathing, wheezing or shortness of breath.
- ▶ Coughing up blood. Dark or rusty coloured sputum may indicate blood.
- ▶ Persistent earache.
- ▶ You become drowsy or confused.
- ▶ A cough that persists longer than 3-4 weeks.
- ▶ You develop any symptoms which you are unhappy about, or do not understand.