

Colds and Flu

Colds and flu are caused by viruses that spread around the world in epidemics and are responsible for considerable ill health. In extreme cases they can lead to death. Viruses attacks our body's cells, resulting in various symptoms, depending on the strain of the particular virus.

Generally, a cold comes on gradually and flu strikes suddenly. You can feel fine in the morning and lousy by the afternoon.

Many of us think we have had "flu" when all we have is a bad cold. When you have influenza you will know the difference, you will feel terrible and it is sometimes impossible to leave your bed. Symptoms include a sudden onset of fever and chills, aching muscles, a dry cough, headache, fatigue and sometimes a runny nose or sore throat.

The classic symptoms for a cold are sneezing, blocked-up nose, coughing and mild temperature changes. In general, a cold lasts about a week. If your immune system is in good shape though, your cold could be gone in three or four days.

You can be sick with flu for up to 10 days and fatigue can persist for two to three weeks afterwards. A cold rarely produces serious complications, but flu can lead to bronchitis or pneumonia, especially for more vulnerable age groups such as young children and the elderly.

Vitamin C supplementation has always been associated with the cure and prevention of colds and flu. Contrary to popular belief, vitamin C won't prevent a cold, but it may shorten the duration or minimize the symptoms. Mega-doses of vitamin C – up to 2000mg – 5000 mg a day have been suggested, but this has never been proved in scientifically conducted tests. High doses of Vitamin C can cause stomach upsets and kidney stones. If you do feel you have a cold coming on you could increase your Vitamin C intake to 500 mg a day, and continue for as long as the cold lasts. It is hard to get 500 mg of Vitamin C from a normal diet, so a supplement will be necessary.

Here are some other ideas for getting rid of a cold sooner:

- Garlic is a proven antibacterial and decongestant, and it's so easy to include fresh garlic in the diet
- Oils of thyme and eucalyptus may help to clear congestion. Add drops to boiling water and inhale
- Ginger and chillies are stimulating spices which help fight off the viruses and are definitely decongestants
- Echinacea stimulates the immune system
- Zinc lozenges may help to halt a cold, possibly by destroying the virus.

You can also help yourself by washing your hands often to reduce your chance of catching an infection.

A flu injection could be 70-90% effective and you should be vaccinated before the flu season starts.

Make friends! A study revealed that those with wide social networks developed fewer cold symptoms.

Finally, stop smoking. Smokers are twice as likely to catch colds as non smokers.