



Colds and Nasal Congestion

After a local and national public consultation on “over the counter” (OTC) medicines, we do not prescribe simple cold and nasal congestion treatment anymore. A cold and nasal congestion is a common condition and most people are able to treat themselves with OTC products without the need to visit their GP or the need for antibiotics.

Antibiotics are ineffective for treating a common cold; they won't relieve your symptoms or speed up your recovery. Antibiotics are only effective against bacterial infections and colds are caused by viruses.

How do I treat?

Common colds are treatable with some simple measures. To help you get better more quickly:

- **Rest and sleep**
- **Keep warm**
- **Drink plenty of water** (fruit juice or squash mixed with water is ok) to [avoid dehydration](#)
- **Diet and fluids** - Eat healthily, including at least five portions of fruit and vegetables every day.
- **Over the counter medicines** - **Speak to your pharmacist** for advice if you're not sure which type of medicine is best for you and your symptoms:
 - **Blocked or runny nose** – you can relieve using tablets containing pseudoephedrine, the inhalation of steam or decongestant sprays. Check with your pharmacist if this is suitable for you
 - **Headaches, muscle aches, a raised temperature** - ease aches or lower a temperature with painkillers like paracetamol, ibuprofen or aspirin. Avoid giving aspirin to children under the age of 16 and follow the manufacturer's instructions
 - **Sore throat** – Use pain killers to relieve symptoms. There is not enough good quality evidence to recommend non-prescription gargles, lozenges and throat sprays, however you may still find them helpful
 - **Coughs** – Stay hydrated, try simple home remedies, such as 'honey and lemon' drinks. There is little evidence to say whether OTC medicines are effective for relieving cough symptoms. You may feel you get some benefit from OTC preparations, speak to your pharmacist for advice
 - **Be careful** not to use cough and cold medicines if you're taking paracetamol and ibuprofen tablets as it's easy to take more than the recommended dose.
- There's little evidence that supplements (such as vitamin c, zinc, echinacea or garlic) prevent colds or speed up recovery.

When should I seek advice?

Most colds are not serious and get better by themselves. Contact NHS 111 or 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

For more information

- Visit your local pharmacy for advice

Be self-care aware

Find out more about self-care at www.nhs.uk