

RESPIRATORY INFECTION TIPS

If you have been running a fever over 101 F in the last 24 hours or are moderately ill, stay home and **rest** to help prevent others from catching your illness and let your body focus its energy on fighting the infection.

Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your elbow, rather than your hand, when coughing or sneezing. Respiratory infections can spread more effectively by your own hands to your eyes, nose, or mouth than from contaminated air. **Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth** with your hands and **wash your hands** after touching your face.

Ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil) can help with fever control and aches. Take the appropriate dose for your weight (up to 600 mg for adults) every 6 hours (when awake) for 4 doses (1 day) if your temperature goes above 101 F. Acetaminophen (ex Tylenol) can be used instead of Ibuprofen but only lasts about 4 hours per dose, and care must be taken not to exceed doses toxic to the liver, especially if taking multiple medications that include acetaminophen.

Elevate your head and chest while in bed, get plenty of rest, and stay well hydrated to keep secretions loose (keep fluids within arms length, **use a humidifier** in the bedroom, and inhale humidified air (under a towel for increased effect) for up to 10 minutes one to three times a day as needed to relieve congestion, especially just prior to going to sleep). A cool mist humidifier will not cause burn injuries while a hot steam humidifier may if used at close range or by small children.

A **saline nasal spray or irrigation** (OTC) helps loosen nasal secretions and can help relieve nasal congestion and sinusitis (ask pharmacist about a **Neti pot**). Saline nasal irrigation is safe and remarkably effective to shrink mucosal swelling, promote sinus decompression, and even remove antigens and inflammatory mediators.

Hydration, humidified air, and an expectorant [ex Guaifenesin (Mucinex)] for ages 2 and up help **loosen chest congestion**.

Over-the-counter cold and flu medications do not treat the infection but can help decrease bothersome symptoms. Infant deaths from cough suppressants and decongestants have been reported. Dextromethorphan and Pseudoephedrine are no longer recommended for children under 6. Decongestants can exacerbate (worsen) cardiovascular disease (ex hypertension, and dysrhythmias). Nasal congestion can be treated with Oxymetazoline nasal spray (ex Afrin), but use should be limited to 2-3 days to avoid rhinitis medicamentosa (loss of efficacy, rebound nasal swelling, and dependence). **Consider limiting decongestants** to just prior to airline flights or to decrease (not eliminate) severe congestion or drainage.

Cough suppressants decrease the normal cough reflex and thereby may increase the risk of more serious lower respiratory infections (ex pneumonia). Still, they may be desirable for short-term use for cough interfering with sleep or dry nonproductive coughs. Dextromethorphan is OTC and Benzonatate (Rx Tessalon) are somewhat effective. Honey (1 teaspoon at bedtime for children older than 12 months) is as effective as dextromethorphan and endorsed by the World Health Organization.

Antihistamines (ex OTC Diphenhydramine such as Benadryl) may dry secretions too much and should be reserved **for allergy symptoms** (sneezing and itchy watery eyes and nose) rather than respiratory infections.

Never smoke cigarettes. Smokers get more frequent respiratory infections, more severe infections, and have more difficulty clearing their infections. If you smoke, stop.

Antibiotics do not cure viral respiratory infections, but they are effective in treating several disorders that can present like or follow a common cold (bacterial pneumonia, otitis media, sinusitis, pharyngitis, or bronchitis). While your infection symptoms may resolve over the first week or so, it is not uncommon that your cough may persist for 3 to 6 weeks until your lungs clear. **Antiviral** medications may help for a few specific infections (ex Tamiflu for Influenza), especially if started during the first few days of the illness.

If you feel you are getting worse, consider being re-evaluated for disease progression. **Symptoms of pneumonia** may include worsening shortness of breath, chest pain, and fever.

For additional information on this and other health issues, visit: MedlinePlus.gov