

Approach to the Common Cold

What prevents the common cold?

- Best evidence is for **hand washing, exercise** and **daily zinc** (zinc can cause nausea, I don't recommend it)
- Possible benefit for **probiotics**, but not definitive (L. casei or L. rhamnosus)
- No proven benefit to ginseng (Cold FX), echinacea, or vitamin D
- Vitamin C may be beneficial in marathon runners and those in extreme climates

How should I treat my symptoms?

- **Remember that symptoms of common cold will usually resolve without any treatment**
- Most over the counter treatments don't actually give any benefit, so save your money!
- If you really want to treat, then treat the specific symptoms, including runny nose, nasal congestion, cough, aches, sore throat, or fever
- Always ask the pharmacist for generic products when possible, rather than paying top dollar for brand name products on the shelf

Sore throat?

- Most sore throats are from a virus, and antibiotics won't help at all
- Viral sore throats are best treated with **acetaminophen** or **ibuprofen, salt water gargles, honey, and lozenges**; viral sore throats don't need to see a doctor
- Strep throat is caused by bacteria (should get antibiotic), usually with some combination of: fever, tender neck lymph nodes, absence of cough, and pus on the tonsils

Runny nose or nasal congestion?

- Unless it last more than a few weeks, or you have a specific concern, this does not need to see a doctor
- A combination of an **oral antihistamine** and a **decongestant** can help, but I generally recommend avoiding them...symptoms will usually resolve on their own!
 - **Oral antihistamine -> chlorpheniramine**
 - can cause dry mouth and sedation
 - the newer antihistamines (Claritin, Aleris, Allegra, Reactine) don't work for cold symptoms, they only help with allergy
 - **Decongestant -> oral pseudoephedrine** (xylometazoline is the nasal form)
 - phenylephrine is not as good
 - Personally I would strongly advise against ever using a decongestant
 - Don't use the decongestant for more than 3 days
 - Don't use the decongestant if you have heart disease, stroke or issues with blood pressure – It puts blood pressure up!
- **Ipratropium nasal spray** (Atrovent) has been shown to help
- Consider **nasal irrigation**
- **Oral zinc** has been shown to provide some minimal benefit (never use nasal zinc)

Cough? (If you have any of fever, significant sputum, night sweats or shortness of breath, you should be evaluated for possible pneumonia. Non-resolving cough should also be seen.)

- **Humidified air** can be beneficial
- **Honey** taken at bed time is effective (not for children under 12 months of age)
- Vapour rub carries a risk of burning sensation in the nose and mouth
- No proven benefit to vitamin C, intranasal zinc, ginseng, Echinacea or codeine
- Guaifenesin is an "expectorant", but has not shown to provide benefit

Do you have a history of allergies?

- The allergies may be contributing, and using a prescription **nasal steroid** may help

Do you think you may have a sinus infection?

- Antibiotics are never prescribed earlier than 7 days unless you are having severe pain, high fever, vision changes, signs of meningitis, or visible facial swelling
- In the first 7 days, we recommend treating with a **sinus rinse**, and **acetaminophen** or **ibuprofen** for pain/aches
- After 7 days, first line treatment will likely be **nasal steroids** for 72 hours
- If no improvement after 72 hours, the next treatment will be **antibiotics**