

# Colds, Runny Noses and Coughs

## TREATING YOUR CHILD'S COLDS

Everyone has colds, and babies and small children are particularly susceptible. You can help prevent colds. Babies and children have more colds than any other illness. In the first two years of life infants can expect to have eight to ten colds. More colds than this can be expected if there are older school children in the house or if the infant is in daycare. Because babies' colds may lead to complications such as ear infection and pneumonia, we urge that infants under a year of age stay away from others who have colds. We recommend that you restrict visiting to infants less than two months of age and avoid having them around groups of children, even those who at the moment appear healthy. When others in the family have colds, teach them to cover their coughs, dispose of used tissue in closed containers, wash their hands after blowing their noses, stay as far as possible away from those who are not sick, and avoid using anyone else's spoons, cups, towels, or washcloths. An older child usually does not need to see a doctor unless his or her illness becomes more serious. The parent of an infant six months and under should probably call the pediatrician or his nurse as sometimes symptoms can be misleading with the illness quickly developing into something more serious like bronchiolitis or pneumonia. For the infant over six months, as well as younger infants, the pediatrician should be called if the breathing is noisy or rapid, the nostrils flare with breathing or if there is blue color to lips or nails. Other warning signs include progressive or persistent cough, fever over 102, excessive sleepiness or irritability, ear pain, and nasal mucus that becomes thick and green.

Children will have fewer colds and less risk of complications from them if they are not exposed to tobacco smoke. Smoke in the home greatly increases the risk of colds, pneumonia, ear infection, sinus disease, and bronchitis in children, and also in adults, and each of these infections will tend to be more severe and last longer.

Colds are due to virus infections. Antibiotic treatment is usually necessary for ear infection, pneumonia, or other complications, but is of no value for treatment of a cold. In fact, overuse of antibiotics when they are not necessary can contribute to the emergence of drug resistant bacteria in a community. Any cold may last a week or more and make a person uncomfortable. Sensible personal and home care is the keys to recovery without complications. These are a few helpful hints regarding medical treatment and home care:

“ Fever may be controlled with acetaminophen, but we do not recommend its use except with moderately high fever because it may interfere somewhat with the body's ability to fight the cold.

“ Extra rest and extra liquids to drink are always helpful. Extra rest in a warm, comfortable environment, while drinking extra water and other liquids, provides the best help for the body to fight the virus. Your child should remain indoors until fever has gone for at least 24 hours. Avoid exposure to wind, rain, and cold weather as much as possible till the cold is over.

.. Nose. Congested noses interfere with comfort and sleep and make babies more likely to swallow air and spit up. When due to a cold, nasal mucus can be cleared with nose drops. Until a child is able to blow the nose, use salt water - ¼ tsp in 1 cup of warm water, 1 or 2 drops in each nostril. Then use the bulb syringe to suction mucus out of the nose. A new useful commercial saline product is "Simply Saline" which comes in a small canister and provides a gentle saline irrigation of the nostrils (better tolerated by children over two years old). Children over 2 may use ¼% Neo-synephrine or pediatric Afrin nose drops or spray 3 or 4 times a day, but these nose drops or spray should not be used longer than 3 or 4 days without consulting a doctor because of complications which occur with longer use in some children. Moist air from the humidifier often soothes the nose more than medicated drops. When your baby has a nose cold, try to clear the nose carefully before feeding, and have him nurse or take his bottle in a sitting position to help to protect his ears from infection.

.. Oral decongestant medicines may help older children, but occasionally they may cause drowsiness or hyperactivity. We do not generally recommend decongestants for children under 1 year of age because of their tendency to dry nasal secretions and further plug infant's nasal airways. Also studies have shown that they are relatively ineffective in small infants despite what advertisements on TV and in magazines would lead you to believe. We also do not recommend decongestants when your child has an ear infection, and we discourage their use in older children whenever the child's nasal secretions are thick and difficult to clear.

.. Throat. Breathing warm moist air often relieves the pain of sore throat more than any medicine. Older children will find relief by gargling with a mixture of ½ teaspoon of salt and ½ teaspoon of baking soda in a glass of warm water. Lozenges are safe for older children. Any throat, which is sore over 2 to 3 days, particularly if there is fever or swollen glands, should be checked by your child's doctor to rule out streptococcal infection.

.. Chest. Breathing moist air may also help a cough. While many people have found a steam vaporizer helpful, we urge you to use a cool mist humidifier in your child's room because it is safer and more effective. Please note that some children with asthma do not do well with the use of either the vaporizer or humidifier. Be sure to clean and dry the humidifier regularly to prevent mold growth and contamination.

.. Cough medicines and cough /cold preparations should only be considered for a child under three if prescribed by a pediatrician. Cough is a protective mechanism that clears lower respiratory tract mucus and there is usually not need to suppress it. For progressive cough your doctor should be consulted. Children with wheezing, difficult breathing, fever and chest pain, severe cough or any cough, which fails to improve in 3 to 4 days, should always be examined by their doctor.

.. Some children with colds should be checked by their doctor. Your child should be examined if sick with a cold and under 3 months of age, if sore throat lasts over 2 or 3 days or there is history of exposure to streptococcal infection. Your child's doctor should be notified if fever lasts for more than 4 days, if cold symptoms have not cleared within 2 weeks, or if cough is accompanied by chest pain or difficulty breathing. If your child is

unable to sleep or unable to drink liquids in spite of following the recommendations above your doctor should be made aware.

.. Your baby's first cold may worry you far more than later ones. Small infants, when their noses are congested, swallow more air while nursing or taking the bottle and as a consequence are more likely to spit up. Young babies have a difficult time learning to breathe through their mouths when their noses are plugged. If they get chest colds, they are not as effective in coughing mucus up out of their airways. Use salt water nose drops (see above) and the bulb syringe to clear secretions out of the nose. Do this both before eating and before going to sleep. Use the humidifier to keep the room air moist. Encourage your baby to drink some water in addition to the usual milk. Keep the baby indoors, with room temperature comfortable without much change between day and night, and be sure there is no smoke in the house. Call your doctor if your baby has trouble breathing or has a temperature over 100.4°.

.. What if mother gets a cold? If you are caring for your baby and get a cold, your first responsibility is to do what's right for you so that you don't get sicker. Wash your hands carefully before you do anything to care for your baby. Go to another room or as far away from your baby as possible if you need to cough or blow your nose and always wash your hands afterwards. Wearing a mask may also help. Disposable painters' masks, available at your hardware store, are excellent, but they should be thrown away and replaced after 2 hours' use. If you are nursing your baby, be sure to continue, and drink extra liquids to help assure your breast milk supply. Your breast milk contains antibodies, which help protect your baby from many cold viruses, and it will very soon include an increased level of protective antibodies against your current cold.