

Colds and Upper Respiratory Infections

“Colds” (also known as “upper respiratory infections”) are caused by viruses that infect the nose and sinuses. The nose produces clear mucus at the beginning, which later may become thicker and discolored (yellow or green) as the immune system fights back. This is normal and does not mean that the infection is getting worse or antibiotics are needed. Cough often accompanies a cold because the mucus discharge drips and gags the back of the throat, and this sometimes may last for a few weeks!

There are many viruses that cause colds (more than 200 strains!), so it is quite common to have many colds during the year, especially during the winter months. A young child can have as many as 7-10 colds a year on average!

How to treat colds:

- **Get plenty of fluids and rest!** Drinking water, warm decaffeinated or herbal teas, clear broths or soups will keep you well hydrated, and keep the sinus mucus secretions thin.
- Occasionally, saline nose drops (like Ocean Spray) can also help break up the mucus. For a small infant, suction the nose mucus after installing the saline nose drops.
- **Avoid smoking or second-hand smoke**, do not use fireplace or heating sources that may dry out your sinuses.
- **For adults and older children:** Occasional doses of acetaminophen or ibuprofen, or cough medications may relieve headache or discomfort that sometimes accompany viral infections. Over-the-counter medicated nose drops, and decongestants are sometimes used, but there is little scientific evidence that they help. If you use them, follow labeled instructions and do not use them for more than 2-3 days.
- **For children 4 years old and younger: Over-the counter drugs for cough, cold, allergy should NOT BE USED.** They have never been proven to be effective for young children, and may cause serious side-effects.
- **Antibiotics are never recommended** for simple colds or sinus congestion, since they work only against bacteria, not viruses. Unnecessary use of antibiotics will promote the development of resistant bacteria, and it is clearly harmful.
- **Avoid spreading viruses** to others by covering your cough or sneeze with your sleeved arms. Washing your hands after blowing your nose (or after helping your child blow his/her nose), and stay home from work or school during the first couples of days of a cold, when one is most contagious!

When you should seek medical help:

- If symptoms persist beyond 7-10 days, especially with fever and headache, or worsening cough.
- If you (or your child) have severe ear pain, or severe sore throat.
- If there are sudden changes in mental status in a child (lethargy, extreme fussiness)

Remember, the best remedy for colds is plenty of fluids and rest!

For further information or concern, please call, or make appointment:

Benton Health Center
530 NW 27th Street
Corvallis, OR 97330
(541) 766-6835

East Linn Health Center
100 Mullins Drive #A-1
Lebanon, OR 97355
(541) 451-6920

Lincoln Health Center
121 SE Viewmont Ave.
Corvallis, OR 97333
(541) 766-3546

Monroe Health Center
610 Dragon Drive
Monroe, OR 97456
(541) 847-5143