

HOW TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF WHEN YOU'RE SICK

- Most infections, like a “cold” (upper respiratory infection), “flu” (influenza), “sinus infection” (sinusitis), and “stomach flu” (gastroenteritis) are caused by viruses.
- Viral infections cannot be treated with antibiotics. Antibiotics only work on bacterial infections. You may wonder: “why not treat with antibiotics, just in case it’s bacterial?” Health care providers prescribe antibiotics sparingly because the overuse of antibiotics has helped create bacterial diseases that are resistant to antibiotics. Moreover, the unnecessary use of antibiotics may cause unpleasant side effects that can make you feel worse.
- It may be difficult to determine whether a bacterium or a virus is causing your illness. Sometimes a health care provider can make an early diagnosis based on symptoms, but often the only clue is the duration of your symptoms. While the severity of your symptoms does not necessarily imply if your illness is viral or bacterial, bacterial infections do tend to last longer than viral. Symptoms that don’t start to improve after 5-7 days, or slightly improve then worsen again (“double worsening”) are suspicious for bacterial cause.
- Seek timely medical attention if you experience:
 - Fever great than 38.5°C that lasts more than 72 hours.
 - Respiratory, throat, and/or nasal symptoms that do not improve after 7 days.
 - Significant difficulty breathing.
 - Significant difficulty swallowing, speaking, or drooling.
 - Chest pain or pressure.
 - Severe headache, especially if accompanied with neck stiffness.
 - Dizziness or lightheadedness.
 - Changes to vision.
 - Lethargy or severe weakness.
 - Loss of consciousness.
 - Severe abdominal pain.
 - Vomiting that lasts more than 48 hours, without improvement.
 - Unable to keep any fluids down for more than 12 hours.
 - No urine for more than 8 hours.
 - Vomiting blood or material that resembles coffee grounds.
 - Diarrhea that lasts more than 48 hours, without improvement.
 - Blood in stool or black stool
- Whether it’s a viral or bacterial infection, being sick is never enjoyable. Here are a few tips to help manage your symptoms. Before taking any medications, be sure to carefully read the package instructions or consult a pharmacist to make sure the medication is safe for you to take and you are using it properly. These suggestions do not actually “cure” the infection; however, they can help you feel more comfortable while your body fights-off the illness.

FEVER, ACHES, AND MALAISE

- Ibuprofen (e.g. Advil, Motrin) or acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol) to lower fever and reduce body aches.
- Plenty of clear fluids to keep you hydrated. Aim for at least 10 cups daily.
- Rest and sleep, allowing your body time to recover.

COUGH AND PHLEGM

- Plenty of clear fluids to keep you hydrated and phlegm loose.
- Try a humidifier, steam from a hot shower, or basin of hot water (fill a basin with hot water, carefully lean over top the basin, and drape a towel over your head and the basin to trap the steam) to loosen phlegm.
- Elevate your head with extra pillows when you sleep.
- There is not enough evidence to determine whether cough medicines work, but some people may find them helpful.
 - Expectorants containing guaifenesin may help to thin and loosen phlegm, making it easier to cough-up and clear.
 - Cough suppressants containing dextromethorphan may help suppress the cough reflex. This is particularly helpful when you are trying to rest and sleep.

SORE THROAT

- Ibuprofen (e.g. Advil, Motrin) or acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol) to reduce throat pain.
- Lozenges, lollipops, and/or popsicles increase saliva production, alleviating throat dryness and irritation. Some lozenges have a mild numbing agent (such as Hexylresorcinol or Benzocaine) for extra relief.
- Warm or cold drinks and soup - whichever provides you most relief.
- Gargle salt water ($\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt + 1 cup warm water) 2-4 times per day to reduce swelling and irritation and moisturize the throat.
- Plenty of clear fluids to keep you hydrated and throat moist. Aim for at least 10 cups daily.
- Try a humidifier, steam from a hot shower, or basin of hot water (fill a basin with hot water, carefully lean over top the basin, and drape a towel over your head and the basin to trap the steam) to moisten throat.

SINUS CONGESTION AND NASAL MUCUS

- Plenty of clear fluids to keep you hydrated, nasal passages moist, and nasal mucus thin and flowing. Aim for at least 10 cups daily.
- Try a humidifier, steam from a hot shower, or basin of hot water (fill a basin with hot water, carefully lean over top the basin, and drape a towel over your head and the basin to trap the steam) to loosen mucus.
- Neti pot to flush-out nasal mucous and moisten nasal passages.
- Saline nasal spray to moisturize nasal passages and loosen mucus.
- Apply warm, damp towels around your nose, cheeks, and eyes to ease facial pain.
- Elevate your head with extra pillows when you sleep.
- Facial pain caused by pressure buildup in the sinus cavities may be relieved with ibuprofen (e.g. Advil, Motrin) or acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol).
- Decongestant nasal sprays containing oxymetazoline and xylometazoline (e.g. Drixoral, Dristan, Otrivin, Afrin) can temporarily shrink swollen nasal tissue, quickly relieving congestion. However, prolonged use can result in rebound congestion: nasal congestion that worsens due to overuse of decongestant spray. Rebound congestion is tough to treat. Use this medication very sparingly, for no more than three days.
- Corticosteroid nasal sprays (e.g. Nasacort, Flonase) may help to reduce inflammation and mucus in the nasal passages.

NAUSEA, VOMITING, AND DIARRHEA

- Your body quickly loses fluids and electrolytes when you have vomiting or diarrhea, making it easier for you to become dehydrated. Even if you do not feel well enough to eat food, it is most important to keep hydrated. Drink plenty of clear fluids. Aim for 10 cups daily.
- Consider rehydration solution to restore fluids and electrolytes. You can purchase pre-made solution (e.g. Gastrolyte) or make your own. Here are some homemade recipes:
 - 4 cups water + 1 teaspoon salt + 2 tablespoons sugar + sugar-free flavouring (e.g. Crystallight, MiO).
 - 4 cups water + 1 soup bouillon cube + $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt + 2 tablespoons sugar
 - 3 cups water + 1 cup apple juice + $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
- Dimenhydrinate (e.g. Gravol) can help reduce nausea. Use this medication only as-needed. As your body gets used to it (even after taking it for only a few days), it needs more and more of it to give you the same effect (you build up a tolerance).
- Loperamide (e.g. Imodium) can temporarily reduce the frequency of diarrhea.
- Attapulgit (e.g. Kaopectate) absorbs extra liquids in the bowel, which helps make stools more solid.
- Bismuth (e.g. Pepto-Bismol) works by decreasing inflammation and blocking the body from releasing more fluid into the bowels.