

The Common Cold and Children

What are colds? Why do we get them?

- A cold is an infection caused by a virus.
 - Signs and symptoms: Stuffy or runny nose (can be clear, yellow or green at times), cough, sore throat, fever and/or body aches.
 - Colds are spread person-to-person by touching, sharing food and drink, coughing and sneezing.
 - Prevent spread by frequent hand washing.
 - Typically children get about six to eight colds per year.
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What should I watch for?

Consider contacting your doctor for further evaluation if your child develops the following symptoms as they could indicate something more than a common cold:

- Fever greater than 100.4 F or 38 C for:
 - Longer than 72 hours in a child 3 months and older that appears to be acting and drinking normally.
 - Any fever in a child under 3 months old.
- Persistent ear pain.
- Crusting of the eyes.
- Thick nasal discharge for longer than 10 days.
- Rapid breathing or unusual breathing patterns.
- If your child's cough routinely lingers more than two weeks after colds, or your child has a long lasting nighttime cough or coughs with exertion as this could be a sign of asthma.

What's the best way to treat a cold?

- A child's immune system is able to fight the infection by itself, so no special medication is needed – only time and rest!
- Antibiotics don't fight viruses, so they can't help with colds.
- Acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) can ease the fever and aches that come with many colds. Even if your child does not have a fever, these medications may make your child feel better.
- To help with a stuffy or runny nose, you can use saline (salt water). You can purchase this at the drugstore or make it at home and use a bulb syringe. Make saline by adding ¼ teaspoon of table salt in half a cup (4 ounces) of water.
 - For babies: Nasal saline drops can be used to loosen mucus, then a bulb can be used to suck it out. This can effectively clear the nose.
 - For older children and teens: Put three drops of saline in each nostril while the child is lying on their back on a bed with their head hanging over the edge. Wait a minute; then have them blow their nose. Repeat until the nose is clear.
- For a cough:
 - A teaspoon of pasteurized honey before bed may help children who are at least one year of age.
 - Heated humid air (like a steamy bathroom) may help.
- Drinking lots of fluids is important. It is not unusual for children to eat a little less when they are sick. As long as they are urinating regularly, their appetite and weight will rebound when their illness is over.

Can cold medications help?

There are many medicines and herbs available that claim to help children get over a cold more quickly or help them feel better while they have a cold. Unfortunately, most have not been proven to help. In medical studies:

- Decongestants, antihistamines and cough medications found in most cold remedies have been proven to make little or no difference.
- Vitamin C and the Airborne supplement have been proven to have no effect.
- Results on zinc preparations have been mixed. They may shorten an illness slightly if started right away. But they can cause nausea when taken by mouth and loss of smell when put in the nose.

Many cold remedies are sold as blends of multiple ingredients. Giving multiple products with overlapping ingredients to your child leads to overdosing cold medicines. Overdosing can lead to jitteriness, difficulty sleeping and even death in young children. These medications are NOT recommended for children under 6 years of age. They are unlikely to be helpful in older children.

How long will the cold last?

- Most fevers go away after about three to five days.
- The cough, runny and stuffy nose can last for two weeks.

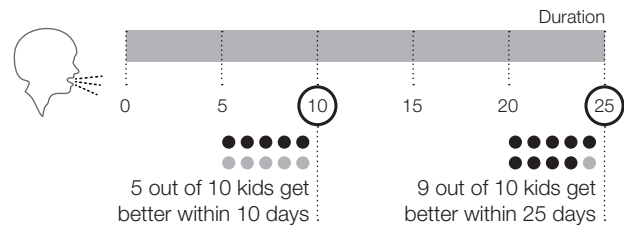
Should I worry about ear infections?



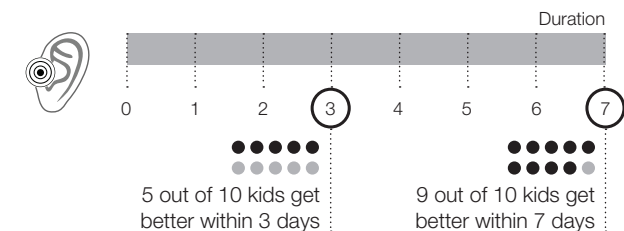
If your child is tugging at his or her ear but is eating and sleeping well, this is not a cause for concern. This may be caused by pressure in the ear but it is unlikely that it is a bacterial infection. Even if an ear infection develops, many infections will resolve without antibiotics. It is not dangerous to let mild ear infections resolve by themselves. The most important thing is to provide pain medication so the child is comfortable.

When will it get better?

Cough

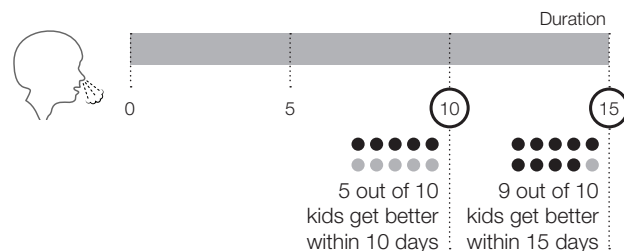


Earache



Common Cold

(Includes nasal symptoms and cough)



Sore Throat

