

## Cough and cold fact sheet

Symptoms of a cold, cough, flu, nasal congestion and ear infection may last longer than you think. The majority of cold and flu symptoms will be over in 4-5 days but complete recovery can take up to 10 days and sometimes longer. There is no 'cure' but you can treat the symptoms with some practical self-help measures and over-the-counter (OTC) medicines (sold without a prescription) which don't require a trip to your GP. **Your pharmacist can advise on what OTC medicines are best for you.**

If you have flu, this is the time when you will have a high temperature and symptoms that come on quickly. You will be shivering with a headache, muscle aches in your back and legs and you may feel dizzy. The high temperature should go down within 48 hours. If you have a cold, this is the incubation stage (the time between catching an infection and symptoms appearing) meaning there are no symptoms to tell you that you have contracted a cold virus.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- **Get plenty of rest, preferably in bed.**
- **Drink plenty of fluids.**
- **You could take paracetamol or ibuprofen to reduce your temperature and ease aches and pains.**
- **It's probably best to stay at home to avoid spreading your cold to others.**
- **Take it easy and rest if possible.**
- **Keep warm and keep the atmosphere moist.**
- **Drink plenty of fluids, as you will lose a lot through mucus production and possibly perspiration.**
- **If your throat is very sore take a cough lozenge or use a spray.**
- **Avoid smoking**
- **Use steam inhalations to make the mucus in your nose and chest more liquid and help get rid of it.**
- **A cough is a normal function of the body as it tries to get rid of phlegm. It can be relieved with a cool drink but if it continues to be troublesome, a range of cough mixtures are available.**
- **Sleep with your head on a high pillow if your nose is stuffed up at night.**

### Useful facts

- **Types of cough** A cough may be *acute*, lasting less than three weeks, or *chronic*, when it may go on for more than eight weeks. Cough can also be dry or productive of sputum (*phlegm*).
- **Frequency** Most adults experience episodes of coughing between two and five times a year, and about one in five people suffer from coughs during the winter months.
- **What causes coughs?** Acute cough is most commonly caused by a *viral upper respiratory tract infection (URTI)* due to a cold. A chronic cough is common in smokers and can sometimes suggest an underlying lung problem, but may also be caused by conditions outside the lung, such as heartburn (*gastric reflux*). Cough may also result from taking certain drugs (check the label), asthma, and environmental factors (dusty workplaces, for example).

### What can I expect to happen?

- ***Coughing is usually harmless*** Although coughs can be distressing (both for yourself and others living or working with you) and a nuisance because they often last for several weeks, acute coughs are almost always harmless and usually start to improve within three weeks.
- ***No need for antibiotics*** Antibiotics do not work against viral infections, which cause most acute coughs, and so they may do more harm than good.
- ***Duration*** You may easily suffer a dry cough for 3 to 4 weeks after an infection has settled.