

# Cold's Verses Flu and What to Do

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Both the common cold and the flu affect the respiratory system, and both are caused by viruses, albeit different ones. Because they are so similar they can be a bit difficult to distinguish by symptoms alone, but the common cold is usually more mild in the intensity and there are some general differences.

The common cold rarely results in serious health problems such as: pneumonia, bacterial infections, or hospitalization which can happen with influenza. The symptoms of a cold can last 1 to 2 weeks and it is the leading cause of doctor visits. Children have about 6 to 10 colds per year, while adults average 2 to 4 (likely due to the more hand washing and less face touching). While not as contagious as other viruses such as influenza, a person is most likely to transmit a common cold virus when he or she is experiencing symptoms, especially during the first few of days (specifically day 2 to day 4), when symptoms are at their worst. A person becomes less contagious as the cold symptoms improve. There are more than 200 viruses that are known to cause the common cold.

Symptoms usually begin 2 to 3 days after infection and often include:

- Mucus buildup in the nose
- Difficulty breathing through the nose
- Sneezing
- Cough
- Headache
- Fever
- Swelling of sinuses

The Flu, or influenza, is more contagious and more severe than the common cold. It is estimated that 10 to 20% of the population comes down with the flu, each flu season, which is usually from late November to March. Children are 2 to 3 X more likely to get sick. The period of contagiousness depends on the age and health of the affected person, but studies show it is 1 day prior to becoming sick and for 5 to 7 days after they first develop symptoms. Some young children or those with weak immune systems may be contagious for over a week. People often retain some immunity to the flu (the particular strain you had and variations of it) for the next year or more. The healthier you are, the longer your immunity to that strain will last. There are three "strains" of the flu: A, B, and C. Thus if you had influenza A, it will not make you immune to influenza B.

Symptoms are more intense than with a cold and include:

- Fever (usually declines on the 2 or 3 day)
- Chills
- Runny or Stuffy nose
- Sore Throat
- Loss of appetite
- Extreme fatigue (not common with a cold)
- Headache (more severe than with a cold)
- Dry cough (not common with a cold)
- Body aches (not common with a cold)

- Children can have gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, but these are uncommon in adults. (Stomach flu is not influenza and usually is bacteria or parasitical.)

Symptoms come on about 48 hours after exposure and after 2 or 3 days the fever subsides. Other acute symptoms rapidly discontinue, but the cough, weakness and fatigue may persist for several days or even weeks longer. Complications to the flu can be quite problematic. People do die from flu complications each year, especially the elderly. After a brief period of improvement the following symptoms may occur if there is a complication and you should seek medical advice if any of these occur: High fever, shaking chills, chest pain, coughing thick yellow-green mucus.

## **Prevention:**

Influenza and the common cold are both spread from person to person in the respiratory fluid, by coughing or sneezing usually within 3 feet of the affected person. While less common, it can be spread by touching infected objects or person and then touching one's own mouth, nose, or eyes. Rhinoviruses can live up to 3 hours on your skin or on objects. The key for spreading is touching the mouth or nose, thus washing your hands and avoid touching your face while around those who are sick will to a large degree prevent you from getting sick. Here are the general rules to avoid getting sick:

- Avoid close contact (5 to 6 feet away) with those who are sick.
- Wash your hands frequently!!! Use warm soapy water for at least 15 seconds.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Use disinfectants.
- Practice general health habits: Eating a balanced diet, getting enough sleep, and exercising can help the immune system better fight off the germs that cause illness.
- Avoid stress if you are feeling "run down".
- Stay social: Common cold research has also shown that the more social you are, the less likely you are to get sick. It could be because having more social contacts and support is less stressful than keeping to yourself, but this is a little speculation.

To avoid infecting others, use the same list as above plus:

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
- Stay home for the first 4 or 5 days if possible.
- Especially avoid the elderly over 60, as they are particularly susceptible to flu complications.

## **Treatment:**

Common cold treatment options include:

- Resting in bed.
- Drinking plenty of fluids - at least 10 glasses of water per day (for an adult).
- Avoid sugar of all kinds, as even "honey" and other healthy sweeteners, as they all\* contain fructose and/or sucrose which causes the neutrophils (white blood cells) to become lethargic. (\*Stevia has some, but you only use a small amount of stevia, so this one is ok.)
- Gargling with warm salt water.
- Using a cool-mist humidifier.
- Taking common cold medicines (there are some herbal ones like Nin Jiom).

- ❑ Echinacea (This will not prevent a cold but may have some value treating a cold. Research shows, however, it is not effective at all in children age 2 to 11.)
- ❑ Hot fomentations to the chest may aid congestion.
- ❑ Prevent over fatigue and chilling.
- ❑ Hot foot baths may assist relieving headaches and nasal congestion.
- ❑ Back rubs may be given as a comfort and to activate the immune system
- ❑ Fresh air, but no draft in the room.
- ❑ Use the “coughing exercise” by Dr. Thrash.
- ❑ Boost your immune system with garlic and mushrooms. Oriental mushrooms such as shiitake, maitake, and reishi contain compounds that bolster your immune system. So by eating these types of mushrooms, you're better able to fight off a cold.

**Coughing Exercise:** “Learn to cough productively. Using diaphragmatic breathing, breathe slowly and deeply. Hold the breath for several seconds, then cough two short, forceful coughs with the mouth open. The first cough loosens, the secretions, and the second should remove them. Hold breath for a few seconds, then inhale gently.” Dr. Thrash, MD

### **Myths & Facts:**

Vitamin C will help prevent colds - MYTH - several large-scale, controlled studies involving children and adults were conducted. To date, no conclusive data have shown that large doses of vitamin C prevent colds. Of course if you are low in vitamin C, you should eat up some vitamin rich foods like bell peppers and oranges. (There are some that say you need mega doses, over 5000mg, but this is hard on the kidneys, can cause diarrhea, and is still not proven effective.)

Being cold will increase your chance of getting a cold or flu - MYTH - While extreme cold can cause hyperthermia it cannot cause a virus. Being cold does not necessarily wear down your immune system, in fact Spirit of Prophecy recommend going for “a ride” when sick, even in the cold winter months. (You can be sure it was brisk in those buggys.)

Antibiotics will help cure the flu - MYTH - Antibiotics are for bacteria infections, and the flu is a virus thus antibiotics will NOT help treat influenza. However, if someone has severe complications like pneumonia or sinus infection their doctor may treat that with antibiotics.

Riding in an airplane may increase your flu risk - FACT - Riding on an airplane may increase your flu risk, but it's not clear if it makes it any higher than do other crowded areas.

Use extra blankets to sweat out a cold - MYTH - “But trying to sweat out a cold won't accomplish much,” says Dr. Lisa Bernstein from Emory University. “Unfortunately, that's not going to do it. The cold is caused by over 200 viruses, and it just takes its time up to several days to several weeks for your cold to get out of your system. However, feeling better may be just as important as getting better, Bernstein said, especially with an illness that takes time to get over.”

“Chicken soup” or hot liquids can help you feel better sooner if you have a cold - FACT - While this tip goes at least as far back as the 12th century physician Maimonides (who some historians believe heard it from his mother), there is now solid medical evidence behind a remedy that was once only thought of as merely a comfort food. Dr Stephen Rennard, a US chest specialist, tested various chicken soups, from a traditional, home made soup, to a number of commercial varieties, in the laboratory. Dr Rennard found that the soups had anti-inflammatory properties that acted to stop our throats becoming sore and helped stop the movement of neutrophils (white blood cells that encourage the flow of mucus that accumulates in

the lungs and nose). Interestingly for vegetarians, the vegetables in the soup had some of the same qualities as the chicken.

## **Summary**

What is truly interesting is that the contagiousness of the person and severity of symptoms are directly related. God has preprogrammed us to want to stay home in bed when we are the most contagious or the most seriously affected by a virus. When we are feeling better, or well enough to get around, we are far less contagious or even not contagious at all. The trouble comes when we fight the urge God has given us to rest to get something done we feel is a higher priority. God has designed our bodies to communicate with us and we need to listen to them to enjoy better health and to avoid getting others sick.

One word of caution, we are to be medical missionaries. If you can help someone else feel or get better, don't stay away for fear of getting sick yourself. This is certainly NOT Christ like, nor Biblical. God can protect you from yes, even the flu, and since you should all ready be healthy you are less like to get the flu or for it to last very long. Be cautious and wash your hands lots, but don't let others get left in the cold because of your own selfishness. We are to be willing to die for each other, and yet we are afraid of the common cold? Hmmm, just some food for thought!

## **Resources:**

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention

eMEDtv "Common Cold" by Arthur Schoenstadt, MD

"Natural Remedies" by Calvin Thrash, MD, Phylis Austin, BS, and Agatha Thrash, MD

ABC News Medical Unit "10 Myths About the Common Cold and Flu" By JOSEPH BROWNSTEIN myDr, 2000. Source: Chest 2000; 118: 1150-1157.

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