



## **Colds or Upper Respiratory Infections (URI)**

“Colds” or upper respiratory infections (URI’s) are the most common infectious illness that children have. On the average, children under 6 years of age have 6 to 8 colds per year. Most of these occur during in the fall and winter months.

Almost all URI’s are caused by viruses. They occur by contact with someone else who has a viral infection, not by cold air or drafts. Infants and young children who have older brothers and sisters or who are in day care or preschool will be exposed more often to children with URI’s. Thus, they may have more colds during the winter months than other children.

Young children have frequent colds because their body’s defense against infections (their immune system) is not yet developed adequately to prevent these colds from occurring. Most children need to acquire 100 or more infections by the time they are 10 years old to develop adequate immunity. Thus, your child’s cold now mean fewer colds in the future.

The most common symptom of a cold is a runny or stuffy nose. A sore throat or a dry cough (especially at night) are also common. Fever may be present the first 1-2 days. It is usually mild, but may be as high as 102° to 104°F. Children’s appetites can be poor when they are sick; don’t be surprised if your child does not eat like he/she does normally. Most URI’s last from 3-5 days, but they can be over in a couple of days.

The treatment of URI’s is aimed at relieving the symptoms of the infection. Scientists have not discovered a cure for the common cold. Antibiotics, which are helpful in ear infections or strep throat, are not effective against viruses and thus don’t help in treating colds or URI’s. The following things may help you and your child feel better as he/she gets over his/her cold. However, none of these methods will shorten the length of time that your child has a cold, nor will it prevent him/her from getting another one.

### **General Treatment**

1. Use a room humidifier at night in your child’s room.
2. Elevate the head of the bed (roll a blanket up and put it under the mattress).
3. Offer lots of liquids.
4. Do not give antibiotics (e.g. Penicillin) left over from a previous illness. This may be harmful to your child.
5. If fever is present, give the appropriate dose of Tylenol.

### **Treatment of Congestion or Runny Nose**

Infants and Children under 4yrs.: Use saltwater nose drops. These are useful in removing dried or loose mucous from the nose. To make them: Mix ¼ teaspoon of table salt and 4 ounces of water. Keep this in a clean bottle. Make a new batch every 2 days. To use them: Place 2 drops of the solution in one nostril. Suction out the liquid with a clean soft rubber suction bulb. Repeat the same procedure on the other side. This is especially helpful before feedings, and before and after the infant sleeps.

## **Older infants and children:**

The best treatment is having your child blow his/her nose for 1 to 2 days. However, if your child is having trouble with this, and you or your child is uncomfortable, you may try a decongestion or an antihistamine. These medicines will not cure your child's cold. They may make him/her more active or cranky than usual; or they may make him/her more drowsy. Only use them if needed.

## **Cough and Cold Remedies (For children 4 and over)**

There are three main types of ingredients used in cold remedies:

1. Antihistamines (Benadryl- generic diphenhydramine, chlorpheniramine)  
These drugs reverse the symptoms of allergies. These symptoms are watery and itchy eyes and a clear runny nose with itching. Antihistamines are also used to treat itchy skin from hives, chicken pox, or insect bites. They have no effect on the common cold. Antihistamines cause drowsiness.
2. Decongestions (Sudafed, generic pseudophedrine, phenylephrine)  
These drugs cause shrinking of the blood vessels in the nose and decrease drainage and congestion. They are used to relieve the common cold, allergy or sinus infection. Some children may become irritated or agitated with use.
3. Cough Medicine- There are two ingredients commonly available to treat cough Expectorants (guaifenesin) are supposed to loosen mucous but have little benefit and no side effects. Cough suppressants (dextromethorphan and codeine) work through the brain to decrease the body's stimulus to cough. Dextromethorphan is used for most coughs. In children 1 year and older, ½ to 1tsp. of honey can be given every few hours as needed to relieve coughs.