

1. **Mark your confusion.**
2. **Show evidence of a close reading.**
3. **Write a 1+ page reflection.**

Cough and Cold Remedies: What Works, What Doesn't

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Why is a cold so hard to treat?

“The common cold is not just one illness — it’s a whole mess of different infections that cause the same symptoms. Even if we cure or prevent one, it’s not going to stop the rest,” says Jack O’Horo, M.D., M.P.H., a Mayo Clinic infectious disease specialist.

Unfortunately, nothing can cure the common cold. That includes antibiotics, which treat illnesses caused by bacteria. But some nonprescription drugs can temporarily ease your symptoms.

Here’s some help understanding which nonprescription cold and cough treatments work for adults, which don’t work, and which could be harmful.

Cold medicines that work

These treatments are most likely to help you feel better:

- Pain relievers — Adults can take nonprescription pain relievers such as acetaminophen (Tylenol, others), ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin IB, others) or naproxen sodium (Aleve). Pain relievers might lessen the discomfort of a sore throat, headache or fever caused by a cold.
- Decongestants — Some decongestant medicines, such as pseudoephedrine, can slightly ease nasal congestion. These medications can be taken as pills, liquids, or nasal drops or sprays. You can use decongestant drops or sprays for up to five days to treat a stuffy nose. Using this type of spray for longer, however, can cause rebound nasal congestion. Research also suggests that the decongestant phenylephrine is less effective at treating colds when it’s taken as a liquid or pill.
- Cromolyn sodium nasal spray — This spray may improve cold symptoms, including runny nose, sore throat and cough.

Cough medicines that may work

You also could consider these remedies:

- Dextromethorphan — This cough suppressant might provide a small benefit for adults with coughs due to the common cold.
- Expectorants — Expectorants help clear mucus or phlegm from the chest. Research suggests that the expectorant guaifenesin has a small benefit for adults with a cough.

Can supplements treat the common cold?

More research is needed to determine if these nonprescription remedies can ease cold symptoms:

- Elderberry — Some research suggests that elderberry can shorten the length of the common cold by about two days and reduce the severity of cold symptoms.
- Echinacea — Taking echinacea before you get sick may have a modest effect in preventing colds. Some studies show that this supplement doesn’t work as a cold treatment, while others show some reduction in the severity and duration of cold symptoms when taken in the early stages of a cold.
- Vitamin C — Research on vitamin C is mixed. But some studies have found that regularly taking the vitamin before cold symptoms start may shorten the duration of severe symptoms.
- Zinc — Some evidence suggests that if you take zinc lozenges or syrup within 24 hours after cold symptoms start, it can help shorten the length of colds. However, the Food and Drug Administration issued a warning against using nasal cold remedies containing zinc. They can cause you to permanently lose your sense of smell.

Remember that many supplements can interact with medications — especially blood thinners and certain cancer treatments. Always check with your healthcare team before taking a new supplement.

Cold medications to use with caution

Antihistamines might ease sneezing and a runny nose for a day or two. But unless your symptoms overlap with allergies, these medicines offer no benefits after 6 to 10 days of use. They also can cause side effects, such as drowsiness and dry mouth, eyes and nose.

Also keep in mind that many medications contain multiple ingredients, such as a decongestant plus a pain reliever. Read the labels to make sure you're not taking too much of any medicine in a day.

If you have high blood pressure, you may need to take extra precautions. Carefully check the label of any cold or cough medicine before you take it — some medicines have warning labels for people who have high blood pressure or take blood pressure medicine. Or you may want to speak with a pharmacist.

If you have severe or uncontrolled high blood pressure, don't take a decongestant. These medicines narrow blood vessels, which can reduce swelling in the nose area and other parts of the body. This also makes it harder for blood to flow through a narrowed vessel, which can increase blood pressure. Also, check medicine labels for sodium content — too much salt can raise your blood pressure.

Home remedies for the common cold

While some nonprescription drugs can ease a few cold symptoms, they are no replacement for basics like rest and hydration. “The longer you put those things off, the longer the cold will bother you,” Dr. O'Horo says.

Consider trying these home remedies:

- Stay hydrated — Drink water or juice. Warm liquids, such as chicken soup or tea, might soothe a sore throat and ease congestion by increasing mucus flow. Stay away from caffeinated drinks, which can make dehydration worse.
- Rest — Your body needs rest to heal.
- Gargle with salt water — Dissolve 1/4 to 1/2 teaspoon of table salt in 4 to 8 fluid ounces of warm water. Gargle the solution, then spit it out. This can temporarily relieve a sore or scratchy throat.
- Use a cool-mist vaporizer or humidifier — This can add moisture to your home, which might help loosen congestion. Another option is standing in the bathroom briefly with a hot shower running.
- Try saline nasal drops and sprays — These products might relieve stuffiness and congestion in adults. You also can use a neti pot, bulb syringe, or nasal rinse (NeilMed, others) to flush debris or mucus from your nasal cavity. Fill the neti pot with a mild solution of sterile warm salt water. Stand over a sink and pour the solution into one nostril while your head is tipped forward and slightly sideways.
- Try honey — A teaspoon of honey may help loosen a cough. You can add it to tea or warm water. Do not give honey to children younger than age 1, since honey can contain bacteria harmful to infants.
- Suck on a cough drop or hard candy — This may ease a dry cough and soothe an irritated throat. Just remember that many of these products are high in sugar.

Possible Response Questions

- What are your thoughts about treating a cough or cold? Explain.
- Did something in the article surprise you? Discuss.
- Pick a word/line/passage from the article and respond to it.
- Discuss a “move” made by the writer in this piece that you think is good/interesting. Explain.