

Get better without using antibiotics

How should I treat my cold?

The best way to treat most colds, coughs or sore throats is to drink plenty of fluids and to rest. Colds can last about two weeks and may end with a cough and bringing up phlegm. There are many over the counter remedies to ease the symptoms – paracetamol, for example. Ask your pharmacist for advice. If the cold lasts more than three weeks, or you become breathless or have chest pains, or already have a chest complaint, see your doctor.

What about my children, they're always getting coughs and colds?

It's very common for children to get coughs and colds, especially when they go to school and mix with other children. Ask your pharmacist for advice. If the symptoms persist and you are concerned, see your doctor but you shouldn't expect to be prescribed antibiotics.

Why should antibiotics not be used to treat coughs and colds?

All colds and most coughs and sore throats are caused by viruses. Antibiotics do not work against infections, such as colds, caused by viruses. Viral infections are much more common than bacterial infections.

How long will my illness last?

The table below shows you how long these illnesses normally last.

Illness	Lasts on average
Ear infection	4 days
Sore throat	1 week
Common cold	1 ½ weeks
Sinusitis	2 ½ weeks
Cough or bronchitis	3 weeks

When should you (or your child) go back to your GP practice or contact NHS 111?

(Listed in order of urgency, with the most urgent symptoms first).

1. If you develop a severe headache and are sick.
2. If your skin is very cold or has a strange colour, or you develop an unusual rash.
3. If you feel confused or have slurred speech or are very drowsy.
4. If you have difficulty breathing. Signs that suggest breathing problems can include:
 - breathing quickly;
 - turning blue around the lips and the skin below the mouth; and
 - skin between or above the ribs getting sucked or pulled in with every breath.
5. If you develop chest pain.
6. If you have difficulty swallowing or are drooling.
7. If you cough up blood.
8. If hearing problems develop or if there is fluid coming out of your ears.

Key facts about antibiotics

- Antibiotics are medicines used to treat infections caused by bacteria.
- Antibiotics work by killing bacteria and/or preventing their growth.
- Colds and most coughs are caused by viruses not bacteria, so antibiotics will not help.
- If you take antibiotics when you don't need them, they may lose their ability to kill bacteria.
- Antibiotic resistance is growing. If the bacteria keep "overpowering" the medicines we have, we may run out of ways to kill these bacteria.
- Antibiotic-resistant bacteria can cause serious infections and can be spread to others in your family.
- Taking antibiotics can upset the natural balance of bacteria in your body. This allows other more harmful bacteria to increase. This may result in diarrhoea and thrush.
- Some antibiotics can cause allergic reactions such as rashes, being sick if you also drink alcohol and reactions to sunlight – and other symptoms.

Further information can be found on the following website:

www.nhs.uk/antibiotics