

Self Care Information for patients: Cough & Colds

Summary

A cold on its own can be treated without seeing a GP. You should begin to feel better in about 1 to 2 weeks. A cough will usually clear up on its own within 3 to 4 weeks. Cough and colds can be treated with over-the-counter preparations from a pharmacy or other retail outlets.

What can you do to help?

- To reduce the risk of spreading a cold; wash your hands often with warm water and soap, use tissues when you cough or sneeze and bin them once used as quickly as possible.
- Rest and drink plenty of fluids.
- Gargle with salty water (do not swallow) and steam inhalation.
- Coughs will usually resolve within 3 weeks and colds within 2 weeks.
- A pharmacist can recommend over the counter treatments for cough and colds.
- Ensure you have a flu vaccine if you are in an 'at risk category' as it prevents you from catching the flu but not colds.
- Antibiotics are not routinely needed for coughs and colds because they won't relieve your symptoms or speed up recovery.
- Antibiotics are only effective against bacterial infections, and colds are caused by viruses.

When shall I see a General Practitioner (GP)?

- Cough or symptoms that last more than 3 weeks.
- Bad cough that rapidly gets worse e.g., you have a hacking cough or cannot stop coughing.
- Increased temperature or feeling hot and shivering.
- Difficulty breathing or develop chest pain.
- Unintentional weight loss.
- Side of your neck feels swollen and painful (swollen glands).
- A weakened immune system e.g., because of chemotherapy or diabetes.
- Feeling unwell/worsening symptoms and that are concerning you.
- If you have a long-term medical condition e.g COPD, heart failure.
- **See a GP urgently if you're coughing up blood.**

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