

OVER-THE-COUNTER MEDICATIONS FOR COUGHS & COLDS

Figuring out which over-the-counter medication is right for which cold or flu symptom can be a challenge. Remember that your symptoms may change day to day, and what may work today may not work for different symptoms in a day or two. The doses below are for adults. Remember that many cold formulas contain more than one medication and varying doses of each medication, so remember to always read the label carefully.

ANTI-HISTAMINES — Relieve runny nose. These medications may make you drowsy or dizzy.

- Diphenhydramine (Benadryl)
- Chlorpheniramine (Chlor-Trimeton)
- Clemastine (Tavist)

DECONGESTANTS – Decrease sinus pressure and sinus headache and relieve stuffy nose. May increase runny nose slightly by opening up the sinus passages. Help with clogged ears and ear pain or pressure. Pseudoephedrine may increase blood pressure and shouldn't be used if you have uncontrolled hypertension. The "D" on the name of many medications implies that a decongestant is in the medication like in Claritin-D. Some people feel wired up on this medication.

- Pseudoephedrine (Sudafed)
- Oxymetazoline (Afrin) Nasal Spray. Be very careful with this medication. You may use it for 3 days only, then take a break for at least 4 days. You may then use it for 3 more days only, then stop using it. This medication can be addictive for the nose.

COUGH SUPPRESSANTS – May help suppress cough.

- Dextromethorphan (Vick's)

EXPECTORANTS – For chest congestion, wet coughs with phlegm.

- Guaifenesin (Robitussin)

LOZENGES – For sore throat. I don't recommend drinking citrus juices, like orange juice, when you have a sore throat. The citrus can irritate a raw throat.

- Benzocain or Glycerin

FEVER, HEADACHE, MUSCLE ACHES, PAIN, SORE THROAT – Many medications include acetaminophen (Tylenol). You can take my favorite, ibuprofen (Motrin/Advil) even if you are taking a medication with acetaminophen.

- Acetaminophen (Tylenol) Adults may take 2 extra-strength tablets (500mg each) every 6 hours. Do not take more than 4000 mg of Tylenol (for adults) in 24 hours.
- Ibuprofen (Motrin/Advil) 200 mg tablets. Adults may take 3 tablets every 6-8 hours with a little bit of food on your stomach (glass of milk to a regular meal). The maximum ibuprofen per day for adults is 3200 mg's per day.

There is currently no evidence that high dose Vitamin C, zinc or echinacea help in decreasing cold and flu symptoms.

Lots of rest will help you recover more rapidly. Lots of people don't feel hungry when they are sick with a cold or flu, and that's o.k. Be sure to drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated, especially if you have vomiting, diarrhea, or fever.

_____ If I've prescribed you Robitussin with Codeine here are some important reminders. Coughing is good for you and serves to protect the lungs and prevent pneumonia. I recommend taking 1 teaspoon during waking hours to decrease any nagging tickle in the back of the throat. Take 1-3 teaspoons at night to help you get a good night's rest. This medication usually wears off in about 4 hours, so you may need to redose in the middle of the night. Remember that this medication can make you very drowsy which means someone else should be around to look after young children while you are sleeping as you may sleep too soundly to hear them. Don't sleep with infants in your bed when taking this medication. You should not drive or operate heavy machinery while taking this medication and don't take it with alcohol. And please remember that this medication works so well because it contains a strong narcotic. Do not share this medication with anyone else or take it for a future illness without seeing a doctor.

If you are still over-whelmed in the cough and cold section of your local pharmacy, you can always ask the pharmacist for help. We have handouts on how to pick cold medications for children, so please ask if you'd like one. Do not give adult medications to children.

Return for a re-check of your symptoms if there is a significant change in your symptoms, especially if you experience shortness of breath or your cough lasts longer than 3 weeks.