

## THE COMMON COLD

Colds are caused by viruses. Children often come down with an average of 8-10 colds per year. If you watch children, you will notice how often they put their hands or other objects in their mouths. We all know that we should wash our hands as much as possible, avoid sharing utensils and cups. But, despite all that washing, kids will find some way to get those pesky viruses into their bodies and disrupt your life for the next week or two. Colds usually last between 4-14 days, but can drag on longer at times. Children can also get a second virus during the first virus which can make them seem to last for months. If you pay close attention to the symptoms you may notice when one cold begins, when it fades, and when the next one starts.

Colds are difficult for everyone. Nasal mucus is often what causes the most distress for parents and children. It makes it harder to breathe and eat, increases the cough, and complicates sleeping. Your child is cranky. Then on top of that you or your spouse, or both usually come down with the virus soon thereafter and everyone is feeling horrible.

Unfortunately there are no medications that cure the common cold.

Antibiotics do not work against a virus. Over the counter cold medicines are not very helpful in relieving symptoms and will certainly not cure a cold. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends against the use of over the counter cough and cold medications in children younger than the age of 6 years. The best thing you can do is use various methods listed below to help alleviate the symptoms that are bothering your child the most so that your little one can rest peacefully and get back to normal life as soon as possible.

### **General Tips:**

- Try to have your child rest.
- Have your child drink plenty of fluids to stay well hydrated but don't worry if the appetite is down- It will go back to normal once the child is feeling better.
- At nighttime, elevate the head of the child. An infant or younger child can sleep in a car seat. This puts them at a 45 degree angle, which helps them breathe more easily. Lying flat in bed increases congestion and cough. An older child can be placed on a few pillows.
- Use a cool mist vaporizer in the child's room to help moisten the air.
- Help the child take a warm, steamy shower. This can help nasal secretions run more and make it easier to gently blow/clear the nose, which helps with breathing, eating, and sleeping better. The humidified air is also soothing on the irritated airways in the lungs.

### **Symptomatic Treatment Options**

#### **To help relieve a stuffy nose:**

- Use saline (salt water) drops to thin out the nasal mucus and to decrease the swelling of the tissues. For the infants, using a few saline drops in the nose followed by a nasal suction bulb device can be helpful to clear the nasal passages. For the older kids you can use more of the drops. There are many types of saline available over the counter. For kids who are able to blow their nose, the saline in a metal canister can be helpful (i.e. Simply Saline). Once they reach the age of five, your child may be able to use the saline rinse bottles or neti pots with help. The

saline can be used at least 3 times a day.

-Once at bedtime in a child over age 2 years, you can use Afrin (1 spray in each nostril) for no more than 3 nights to temporarily help with decreasing the swelling of the nasal tissues.

- A bit of Vick's vaporub can also help the child feel more comfortable.

-Note that greenish nasal mucus does not necessarily mean worsening illness or a bacterial infection. Most sinus infections occur much later in the course of a viral illness, often after 10-14 days, with the child clearly looking/acting sicker.

### **To help relieve a cough:**

-Keep fluids close by to drink

-Try a teaspoon or two of honey (if the child is over the age of 1 year) to help coat the throat and help with the cough

-Cough drops may be soothing (for a child over 4 years of age)

### **To help relieve a sore throat:**

-You may give acetaminophen or ibuprofen for severe throat discomfort

-Children over 4 years of age can use throat lozenges with anesthetic like Chloraseptic or Sucrets. If they are under 4 years of age, they can use the throat sprays with the same active ingredient.

-Popsicles and cold drinks work great

-An old fashioned remedy that is soothing is to squeeze a whole fresh lemon into a cup of warm water. Add enough honey to make it palatable and sip.

-For the older child, they can try gargling warm salt water which may decrease the swelling in the throat a short time

### **To relieve a fever:**

-Use acetaminophen for a baby under 6 months of age as needed. You may also use ibuprofen in infants over 6 months of age. The doses are on the container for children over age 2 years, and on our website for children younger than two years.

-Do not overdress/overbundle your child

-Spongebathing with lukewarm water can also help bring down a child's temperature.

### **About other medicines:**

Cough and cold medicines: The American Academy of Pediatrics strongly recommends that over the counter cough and cold medications not be given to infants and children younger than 6 years of age since they have not been proven effective and can be harmful

\*For viral infections, the body needs to fight the virus on its own because antibiotics do not help.

### **When to call the office:**

Fever >3 days

Persistent rapid breathing or any signs of difficulty breathing or respiratory distress

Child acting/looking sicker

