

## Fall Cough and Cold Season is Here!

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With another fall season in full swing, seasonal allergies are not far behind, if not already upon us. Along with seasonal allergies comes the common cough and cold. In this newsletter we will discuss a few ways to avoid and treat symptoms associated with the common cold.

### Avoiding Sickness:

The easiest way to treat any sickness is simply to avoid it all together. Overall good health, including diet and exercise can go a long way. Regular hand washing or using a hand sanitizer can help to prevent the spread of sickness, disease

and some serious infections. This point has been emphasized with the H1N1 (swine) flu scare, no longer can you enter a public restroom without seeing the sign saying "wash your hands to prevent the spread of disease." Good hygiene can not be emphasized enough when it comes to preventing disease including the common cold.



Vaccinations and immunizations are important in preventing sickness as well. Although not directly related to the common cold, the flu and pneumonia vaccine are key to avoiding serious respiratory infection and disease, especially in specific high risk populations.

While there is not a vaccination for the common cold, the annual flu shot is an excellent way to help prevent the flu, or reduce symptoms for those who catch the flu. It can be given to any age group over 6 months, but it is recommended to be given to children and teenagers from age six months up to 19 years. It is also recommended that the elderly and those at high risk of acquiring the flu should receive the flu vaccine annually.

Some people avoid an annual flu shot as they fear they might catch the flu from the shot. The flu shot given is an inactivated form of the virus and therefore cannot give you the flu.

### Treating the Common Cold:

The common cold is something that we have all battled in our lives, and unfortunately seem to encounter at least once a year. As there is no treatment or cure, We can only treat the associated symptoms, either with an over the counter, or a prescription medication.

### QUICK FACTS ABOUT THE COMMON COLD

- The common cold is respiratory disease caused by a virus
- There is no vaccine for the common cold because there are too many different strains of the virus to target
- It is usually seen during seasonal changes when humidity is low
- Symptoms usually last 1-2 weeks
- Over 1 billion Americans a year catch the cold
- Colds are more common in children because of their "immature" immune system
- Symptoms include: runny or stuffy nose, sneezing, coughing, sore throat and watery eyes

For symptoms of the common cold there are many drugs available for treatment. The following are some examples of available over the counter drug classes and the symptoms which they treat.

- Nasal decongestants - alleviate sinus pressure
- Cough suppressants - quiet a cough
- Expectorants - loosen mucus associated with chest congestion so you can cough it up
- Antihistamines - stop runny noses, eyes, and sneezing
- Pain relievers - ease fever, headaches, and minor aches and pains

It is important to remember that while these medications are available without a prescription, it doesn't mean they come without risks. Every drug has side effects, and may not be suitable for all. Individuals with chronic disease states such as diabetes, high blood pressure, or thyroid disorders should be especially careful when selecting an over the counter drug to be sure the selected drug does not interact with any other medication, or worsen their disease state.

Talk to your pharmacist before taking any OTC medication to be sure it is safe for you.

*\*All pseudoephedrine products are kept behind the pharmacy counter per federal law. Please ask your pharmacist for these products.*

## Choosing the Correct Medication:

How do you decide which medication is best for you? It may seem simple at first as you walk in the door, but when you go to the cough and cold section, the choices seem endless with numerous combinations and dosage forms. Do you get one drug or two, combination products or single agents, tablets, caplets, or liquid. The choice of the correct drug can be daunting.

The simplest solution is to ask your pharmacist, who can be extremely helpful in explaining each product and referring you to the most optimal treatment. The following however can help guide you through the selection process.

## Persistent Cough

For that dry cough that keeps you up at night, you need a cough suppressant such as dextromethorphan. Delsym® and Vicks 44® are two products that only contain dextromethorphan. Most cough suppressants are syrups, however these cough syrups are often combination products, and can include large amounts of alcohol, which isn't advisable in children. They do make these products without alcohol as well. Be sure to look at the labels for the alcohol content.

*Diabetics should be careful taking any syrup including cough syrups. This is because any syrup is simply a concentrated sugar solution that can raise blood sugar levels.\**

## Head and Nasal Congestion

For the stuffy head and nose there are two common decongestants; phenylephrine and pseudoephedrine. The more common brand names are Sudafed PE® and Sudafed® respectively. The regular Sudafed® (pseudoephedrine) is kept behind the pharmacy counter and is the "D" in combination cold products such as Claritin-D®, or Zyrtec-D®. Sudafed PE® (phenylephrine) is not kept behind the pharmacy counter. Both products work in similar ways, however one might be advisable over the other in some situations, always ask your pharmacist first.

*Nasal decongestants can cause an increase in blood pressure, and may make it hard to fall asleep. Those with high blood pressure should consider alternative options.*

**CONTACT US:** While it is important to keep open lines of communication with your physician and local pharmacist regarding your prescriptions, we understand that the amount of information received can sometimes be overwhelming.

We would like to remind you that our clinical department is here to help! We want to see our members taking the right medication at the right cost. While not all medications have a true generic, there are often therapeutic alternatives available that could provide the same benefit, while costing you less.

Please feel free to contact our clinical department at any time for questions regarding your prescriptions, or for cost saving alternatives.

For more information  
visit our website  
at: [www.proactrx.com](http://www.proactrx.com)

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## Excessive Mucous

Expectorants such as Mucinex® or plain Robitussin® (guaifenesin) can be used to break up excessive mucous that accumulates in the back of your throat or mouth, affectionately referred to as phlegm. These agents work to clear the cause of your cough, however do not directly suppress your cough. Although guaifenesin is available in combination with cough suppressants, it is not always advisable to choose a combination product as a cough suppressant inhibits your body's ability to clear the mucous. In some cases, such as a productive cough (mucous filled) that keeps you up at night, you may wish to calm the cough at night with a combination product, while using only a plain expectorant during the day.

## Runny Nose and Eyes

Antihistamines are great for 'drying' your nose and eyes. Three of the most common antihistamines include Benadryl® (diphenhydramine), Zyrtec® (cetirizine), and Claritin® (loratadine). These will also help with redness or inflammation associated with an irritated nose. Benadryl® and Zyrtec® can cause drowsiness which can be bothersome during the day. Claritin® is non-drowsy and is sometimes preferred for daytime use.

## Fever, Aches and Pains

Tylenol® (acetaminophen), Motrin® (ibuprofen), Aleve® (naproxen) and aspirin can all be used to help reduce fever associated with a cold, and can help with general aches and pains.

## Combination Products

When looking at combination products, look at the symptoms on the package, or look at the ingredients included. When we know what symptoms the ingredients treat we can pick the best combination product.

While combination products are often a convenient way to treat multiple symptoms it is important to not take more medication than what you need, therefore, in some cases, two products might be better to treat your symptoms than one combination product.

The choices can be overwhelming, so if in doubt don't hesitate to ask your physician or pharmacist for advice.

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