



## Flu Shots and Self-Treatment

**We are committed to providing you and your family with the medical services you need. Our commitment extends to those health conditions that may not require a visit to your doctor—such as colds or the flu. The more you know about these conditions, the better your chances of treating the symptoms successfully. Keeping this in mind, we encourage early and appropriate self-treatment, since it can usually lessen the chances of your cold or flu from keeping you down.**



experience 4 to 9 colds per year. Kids over 5 have 4 to 6 colds per year. And young adults contract 3 to 5 viral upper respiratory infections every year. Women have a tendency to have a higher number of colds per year, possibly because they are exposed more frequently to young children who have colds.

Typically, there are three peak seasons for the common cold each year. Your chances of catching a cold are highest in the fall (usually a few weeks after the opening of school), during the mid-winter, and in the spring. Colds are caused by viruses, and there are approximately 200 different viral strains that are responsible for causing colds. This high number of viruses is the reason why you can get colds again and again. And the fact that a cold can be spread from person to person through airborne particles or touching environmental surfaces and then touching your eyes or nose means that colds are pretty easy to “catch.”

Even though your current cold is caused by a different virus than your last cold, the symptoms may be the same. These include a runny nose; nasal congestion; a dry, scratchy, sore throat; coughing; sneezing; and very mild muscle and joint aches and pains. (The chart on page 3 highlights the symptoms often associated with a cold.)

There is no “quick cure” for a cold, and your symptoms will usually last between 1 to 2 weeks. The good news is that most colds do not require a doctor’s visit, but symptoms can be self-treated with an over-the-counter (OTC) medication. (See the article on page 2, “Proper self-treatment for colds and the flu.”)

### The flu

The flu, also known as influenza, can imitate the common cold. However, the flu can usually be distinguished from a common cold because it seems to hit in epidemics. That means that over a limited period of time, large numbers of people will have the same flu. Flu epidemics of this type are much more common in the winter months.

## Colds and the flu... is there a difference?

### The common cold—a closer look

The common cold is very common indeed. In fact, colds cause more time lost from work and school than any other disease. Children under 5

The major differences between the flu and a cold are the symptoms associated with each condition. Many symptoms of the flu are the same as those of a cold, such as a runny nose, nasal congestion, coughing, and sneezing. However, additional flu symptoms include a fever that comes on quickly. It is usually above 102° F. The flu also causes generalized joint and muscle aches, which are very noticeable, and a general feeling of tiredness and weakness.

The flu, like a cold, is caused by viruses, and the symptoms last approximately 1 week. Unfortunately, like colds, there is no real cure for the flu. However, there are nonprescription medications you can take, along with other steps, to relieve your symptoms so that you can be more active while the virus runs its course.

## Proper self-treatment for colds and the flu

Since colds are caused by viruses, antibiotic medications are not effective in treating them. Self-treatment with OTC medications formulated for colds and the flu is intended to relieve the symptoms that come with the illness, making you more comfortable. In addition to using the appropriate OTC medication, there are a few other things you may also want to do when you have a cold or the flu:



- Get bed rest, if possible.
- Be sure to drink an ample amount of liquids, such as water and fruit juice. This helps prevent dehydration and can soothe your cough.
- Gargle with warm salt water.

There are several OTC medications formulated to provide relief for your cold or flu symptoms. These include single-medication therapies and multiple-medication therapies. The charts included in this newsletter will help you understand what the key ingredients in a product do as well as help you select the product that will give you the most relief from your symptoms.



## A word about flu shots

A flu shot or vaccination may keep you from getting the flu during flu season. Flu shots are recommended for those who are at high risk for serious complications from the flu. These people include:

- Anyone over the age of 65.
- Adults and children with chronic heart and/or lung problems; diabetes, kidney, and blood diseases; or suppressed immune systems.
- Residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities.
- Anyone caring for or living with any of the people in the above groups.

The best time to have your flu shot is soon after Labor Day and by Thanksgiving to prepare for the peak flu season, which is usually between late December and early March. One word of warning—you should not have a flu shot if you are allergic to eggs, since the vaccine is made by growing flu viruses in eggs.

## WHAT DO YOU HAVE?

The chart below lists common symptoms of a cold, the flu, and allergies.

COLD	FLU	ALLERGIES
Runny nose	Runny nose	Runny nose
Nasal congestion	Nasal congestion	Nasal congestion
Sore throat	Sore throat	Sneezing
Coughing	Coughing	Itchy nose
Sneezing	Sneezing	Itchy, watery eyes
	Fever/chills	
	Body aches	

## WHAT SHOULD YOU TAKE?

The chart below shows the various types of nonprescription drugs and the symptoms they treat.

MEDICATION	SYMPTOM
Decongestant	Nasal congestion
Antihistamine	Sneezing Runny nose Itchy nose Itchy, watery eyes
Antitussive	Coughing
Analgesic	Sore throat Fever Body aches

IF YOU ARE TAKING PRESCRIPTION MEDICATION, CONSULT YOUR DOCTOR OR PHARMACIST.

## Allergies—not to be confused with a cold

Allergies are sometimes confused with a cold, since the symptoms can be similar. Colds usually last for a limited number of days (1 to 2 weeks), so if your symptoms last longer (weeks or even months), you might want to find out if you are suffering from allergies. The chart “What Do You Have?” (above) also lists the symptoms associated with allergies and highlights the differences among allergies, colds, and the flu.

Allergies can be seasonal or perennial. Seasonal allergies come and go, depending on the season, and are usually caused by plant pollens. Perennial allergies don't depend on the season, since they are caused by allergens you encounter in your environment every day, such as animal dander, house dust mites, and molds.

## The benefits of self-treatment

There are several thousand nonprescription indications available today, which you can take to relieve specific symptoms. The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates all over-the-counter medications for their safety and efficacy.

Remember—always read and follow label directions for any medication, whether prescription or nonprescription. And if any of your symptoms worsen or persist for more than 14 days, you should see your doctor.



The logo for Bristol Park Medical. The words "BRISTOL PARK" are in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. Below this, the word "MEDICAL" is written in white, uppercase letters, each letter contained within its own dark grey rectangular box.

**BRISTOL PARK**  
M E D I C A L

Bristol Park Medical Group  
[www.bristolparkmed.com](http://www.bristolparkmed.com)

This information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical care. Always follow your health care provider's instructions.  
Provided as an educational service by Schering-Plough Managed Care.