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Health and wellness tips for your work, home, and life—  
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# Try Home Care First

*Before calling a doctor, try these methods*

Modern medicine is an ever-changing science. Physicians and other health care professionals are highly skilled in treating thousands of complex acute and chronic conditions. However, it may surprise you to know that physicians often end up seeing patients for conditions that do not necessarily require a doctor's expertise.

## Helping Yourself

The next time you or someone in your family has cold or flu symptoms, try the following home care techniques. It may save you a trip to the doctor's office and the expense of a visit or insurance copayment.

- Take aspirin, acetaminophen, or ibuprofen to relieve headache, muscle aches, and fever. (Do not use aspirin to treat a child under the age of 18 who has a fever, flu symptoms, or chicken pox without first talking to a doctor. Aspirin may increase the risk of Reye's syndrome, a rare but often fatal condition.)

- Rest at home. If you feel well enough to be up, take it easy.
- Drink plenty of liquids, especially if you have a fever. Your body needs extra fluids to keep your mucous more liquefied, which can help prevent bacterial complications such as ear infections. Salty liquids, like chicken soup, may also combat dizziness.
- If you have a headache or cough, or are congested, a humidifier or hot shower can help you feel better and breathe easier. In addition, a warm washcloth on your forehead and over your eyes can help relieve sinus congestion.

Remember, if you use over-the-counter medications to treat symptoms of a cold or the flu, follow the label directions carefully. A medicine may interact or interfere with other medications you are taking, causing drowsiness, or can be a health risk for those with certain medical conditions.

## Home Care for the Cold and Flu

Common cold and flu viruses account for many unnecessary trips to the doctor. The fact is, there's not much he/she can do to help



resolve these illnesses. Your doctor will likely say "Get some rest, take a pain reliever, drink plenty of fluids, and call me if you don't feel better in a few days." This is sound advice, but is not necessarily worth the cost of the office visit. Instead, you should be able to recognize and treat most cold and flu symptoms on your own.

## Typical cold symptoms:

- Sore throat
- Runny and/or congested nose
- Cough
- Congested ears
- Headache
- Dizziness
- Swollen glands
- Fever, chills

**Flu symptoms** are similar, but should still be distinguishable:

- Sore throat and nasal congestion
- Muscle aches
- Dry cough
- Headache
- Dizziness
- Fatigue
- Fever, chills



### **When to Call a Doctor**

The following guidelines can help you determine when it is appropriate to seek your doctor's advice for cold and flu-like symptoms. Remember, these are only guidelines. You know yourself better than anyone else, and if you have even a slight concern that your condition is serious, consult a medical professional immediately.

### **Sore Throat**

Call your doctor if:

- It lasts more than 48 hours
- The inside of your throat is bright red, swollen, or has white spots or

a rough red rash – especially if you have been exposed to someone known to have strep throat, a bacterial infection.

### **Congestion**

Call your doctor if:

- Your runny nose or nasal congestion lasts for more than 10 days
- Nasal discharge is yellow or green and continues all day
- You experience severe facial pain or headache

### **Cough**

Call your doctor if:

- It lasts for more than 10 days
- It is severe, painful, and produces thick, bloody, or green mucous
- You experience chest pain when you breathe, or have difficulty breathing through your mouth

### **Earache**

Call your doctor if:

- Ear pain is severe
- You have discharge from one or both ears
- You experience ear pain or problems for more than a week

### **Fever**

Call your doctor if:

- You have a temperature of 101°F or more
- It persists for more than 4 days
- You experience chills, shortness of breath, soaking sweats, or mental confusion

- A fever of more than 100°F starts after the third day of your illness

### **Abdominal Pain**

Call your doctor if:

- You experience persistent pain in your abdomen or rectum, or localized pain in the abdomen
- You have black or bloody stools or vomit, or your vomit resembles coffee grounds
- You have more than 8 bowel movements per day

*For more information, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov), or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services website, [www.hhs.gov](http://www.hhs.gov).*

## **Did you know...?**

Taking preventive measures is the best method in avoiding costly doctor visits and treatments. One of the best ways to prevent a cold or the flu is to wash your hands frequently, and keep them away from your eyes, nose, and mouth.