

HOW TO MANAGE COMMON ILLNESSES AT HOME

An initiative by King Cross Practice to help you to manage common illnesses without visiting your doctor or other urgent care services, but identify when you do need a doctor's input.

Coughs	Colds
Sore throats	Eye & ear problems
Sinusitis	Diarrhoea & vomiting

COMMON COLD

An adult can expect 2-4 colds a year and a young child about 3-8 colds a year. Symptoms usually peak after 2-3 days and then ease off over a few days. A cough sometimes lingers for up to three weeks. There is no magic cure. Treatment aims to ease symptoms. The main treatment is to take Paracetamol or Ibuprofen which can ease fever, aches and pains, and so make you feel more comfortable.

WHAT IS A COLD AND WHAT CAUSES IT?

A cold is an infection of the nose and upper airways caused by a virus. Many different viruses can cause a cold. This is why colds recur and immunisation against colds is not possible. Children tend to have more colds than adults as adults have built up immunity to many viruses. Adults have an average of 2-4 colds a year. Young children have an average of 3-8 colds a year.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF A COLD?

- The common symptoms are a blocked (congested) nose, a runny nose and sneezing. At first there is a clear discharge (mucus) from the nose. This often becomes thick and yellow/green after 2-3 days. It may be difficult to sleep due to a blocked nose.
- You may feel generally unwell and tired and you may develop a mildly high temperature (a mild fever).
- Sometimes there is a mild sore throat, hoarseness and a cough.
- A build up of mucus behind the eardrums may cause dulled hearing or mild earache.

Symptoms typically peak after 2-3 days and then gradually ease off. Symptoms have usually gone within a week but in some cases they can take three weeks to clear completely. In particular, a cough can linger for up to three weeks, often when other symptoms have gone. The symptoms, particularly cough, tend to be worse and last longer in smokers compared with non-smokers. A child who lives with smokers has an increased risk of developing coughs and colds.

WHAT ARE THE TREATMENTS FOR A COLD?

There is no magic cure for the common cold. There is no treatment that will shorten the length of the infection. Treatment aims to ease symptoms whilst your own immune system clears the virus.

Note: Antibiotics do not kill viruses, so are of no use for colds.

The most useful treatments are:-

- **Paracetamol** or **Ibuprofen** which will ease fever, sore throats, aches and pains.
- **Making sure you drink enough or give your child plenty to drink.** A fever may cause you to lose extra body fluid by sweating. This may lead to mild dehydration which can make you feel more tired and may cause a headache. Hot drinks are often soothing too.
- **A steam inhalation** may help to clear the nose. It has a temporary effect but may be useful before bedtime to help you get off to sleep. However, beware of scalding yourself if you use hot water. A hot steamy shower is perhaps the safer option.
- **A menthol sweet** may also clear a bunged up nose for a while.
- **Saline drops** are a popular treatment for a bunged up nose in a baby. Consider putting a few drops of saline (salt water) in the nose just before feeds. Some people feel that this helps to clear the nose to make feeding easier. There is little scientific evidence as to how well this works but it may be worth a try if feeding is difficult. You can buy saline drops from pharmacies.

SORE THROAT

Symptoms:-

- Painful tender feeling at the back of the throat
- Discomfort when swallowing
- Nasal congestion or obstruction
- High temperature
- Aching
- Tiredness

Treatment:-

- Sore throats will often pass within 7 days
- Paracetamol or Ibuprofen (available from the chemist)
- Avoid food or drinks that are too hot. Eat cool, soft foods
- Adults and older children may find sucking lozenges, sweets or ice cubes can provide relief
- Avoid smoking or smoky environments
- Use a mouthwash regularly of warm, salty water
- See a doctor if symptoms do not improve after 7 days or if your tonsils are enlarged with white pus spots on them

Antibiotics do not kill viruses!

COUGH

Coughing is your body's way of clearing your air passages. When your throat is irritated by something you may get a dry or tickly cough. During a cold coughing also prevents mucus from entering the air passages and causing infection.

Treatment:-

- Don't smoke and avoid smoky rooms
- Suck a boiled sweet or sip hot honey and lemon drinks
- Inhaling steam with added menthol and eucalyptus (Care MUST be taken to prevent scalding)
- Cough up mucus if you can, put your hand over your mouth when coughing and wash your hands afterwards

- See your doctor if mucus has blood in it, your breathing is painful, wheezy, loud or you are short of breath or if your cough lasts for more than 3 weeks
- Green mucus does not mean you need antibiotics

Antibiotics do not kill viruses!

SINUSITIS

Symptoms:-

- Headache
- High temperature
- Nasal congestion or obstruction
- Pain and tenderness in the face
- Yellow or green nasal discharge
- Loss of taste and smell

Treatment:-

- Paracetamol or Ibuprofen (available from the chemist)
- Decongestant nose drops or sprays (available from the chemist)
- Inhaling steam with added menthol or eucalyptus oil (care MUST be taken to prevent scalding)
- See doctor if symptoms do not improve after two and a half weeks

Antibiotics do not kill viruses!

EAR INFECTION

Symptoms:-

- Fever (temperature about 38.5C)
- Flu like symptoms in children such as vomiting and lethargy
- Slight deafness
- Ear pain

Treatment:-

- About 80% of cases will clear up in 4 days without any treatment
- Paracetamol or Ibuprofen (available from the chemist)
- Keep the ears dry
- See a doctor if symptoms do not improve after 4 days

Antibiotics do not kill viruses!

EYE IRRITATION & EYE INFECTION

Eyes can become red and irritated from many different causes such as allergies or infections. This condition is called conjunctivitis. Infections are due to either viruses or skin bacteria. Red and/or itchy eyes can also be caused by an allergy to pollen, hay fever and air pollution including tobacco smoke. Always wear protective goggles when using power tools.

In children eye infections often occur with cold viruses. These are usually harmless and disappear by themselves. Viruses can reduce the eyes' defences. See your GP if the eye is so red that the white is no longer visible.

Treatment:-

- For eye infections/soreness, cleanse the eye and surrounding area with cool boiled water or cold tea. Often the eyelashes become stuck together – soak crusts away using wet cotton wool. See your GP or chemist if eyes are discharging pus.
- It is safe to cleanse the inside of the lower lid using moist cotton wool – pull the eyelid down slightly and wipe the cotton wool from the side towards the nose. Never use dry cotton wool and never use the same piece for both eyes/other people's eyes.
- If a substance other than acid/caustic substance gets into your eye, try repeated rinsing with lukewarm water. Go to A&E (Casualty) if caustic substance or metal have got into your eye.
- For aching eyes or poor vision consult your optician who can carry out a full eyesight check and can also check for general health of the eyes.
- Your local chemist can advise on eye irritation and infections and provide treatment.

ACUTE DIARRHOEA & VOMITING IN CHILDREN

In most cases diarrhoea eases and goes within several days but sometimes takes longer. The main risk is dehydration. The main treatment is to give your child lots to drink; this may be by giving special rehydration drinks. Also once any dehydration is treated with drinks, encourage your child to eat as normally as possible. See a doctor if you suspect that your child is dehydrating or if they have any worrying symptoms such as those which are listed below.

Symptoms of dehydration

Diarrhoea and vomiting may cause dehydration (a lack of fluid in the body). Seek medical advice quickly if you suspect that your child is becoming dehydrated. Mild dehydration is common and is usually easily and quickly reversed by drinking lots of fluids. Severe dehydration can be fatal unless quickly treated because the organs of the body need a certain amount of fluid to function normally.

- Symptoms of dehydration in children include:- passing little urine, a dry mouth, a dry tongue and lips, fewer tears when crying, sunken eyes, weakness, being irritable or lethargic.
- Symptoms of *severe* dehydration in children include:- drowsiness, pale mottled skin, cold hands or feet, very few wet nappies, fast (but often shallow) breathing. This is a medical emergency and immediate medical attention is needed.

Dehydration in children with acute diarrhoea is more likely to occur in:-

- Babies under the age of one year (and particularly those under six months old). This is because babies don't need to lose much fluid to lose a significant proportion of their total body fluid.
- Babies under the age of one year who were a low birth weight and who have not caught up with their weight.
- A breast fed baby that has stopped breast feeding during their illness.
- Any baby or child who does not drink much when they have gastroenteritis.
- Any baby or child with severe diarrhoea and vomiting (particularly if they have passed six or more diarrhoeal stools and/or vomited three or more times in the previous 24 hours).

When should I seek medical advice?

As mentioned already, most children with diarrhoea have mild symptoms which get better in a few days. The important thing is to ensure that they have plenty to drink. In many cases you do not need to seek medical advice. However, you should seek medical advice in the following situations (or if there are any other symptoms that you are concerned about):-

- If your child is under the age of six months.
- If your child has an underlying medical condition (for example heart or kidney problems, diabetes, history of premature birth).

- If your child has a fever (high temperature).
- If you suspect dehydration is developing (see earlier).
- If your child appears drowsy or confused.
- If your child is vomiting and unable to keep fluids down.
- If there is blood in their diarrhoea or vomit.
- If your child has severe abdominal pain.
- Infections caught abroad.
- If your child has severe symptoms or if you feel that their condition is getting worse.
- If your child's symptoms are not settling (for example vomiting for more than 1-2 days or diarrhoea that does not start to settle after 3-4 days).

What is the treatment for infections diarrhoea in children?

Diarrhoea often settles within a few days as a child's immune system is usually able to clear the infection. Children can usually be treated at home. Occasionally admission to hospital is needed if symptoms are severe or if complications develop.

Fluids to prevent dehydration

You should encourage your child to take plenty of fluids. The aim is to prevent dehydration (low body fluid). The fluid lost in their vomit and/or diarrhoea needs to be replaced. Your child should continue with their normal diet and usual drinks. In addition they should also be encouraged to drink extra fluids. However, avoid fruit juices or fizzy drinks as these can make diarrhoea worse.

Babies under six months old are at increased risk of dehydration. You should seek medical advice if they develop acute diarrhoea. Breast feeds or bottle feeds should be encouraged as normal. You may find that your baby's demand for feeds increases. You may also be advised to give extra fluids (either water or rehydration drinks) in between feeds.

Rehydration drinks may be advised by a doctor for children at increased risk of dehydration (see above for who this may be). They are made from sachets available from pharmacies and on prescription. You should be given instructions about how much to give. Rehydration drinks provide a perfect balance of water, salts and sugar. The small amount of sugar and salt helps the water to be absorbed better from the gut into the body. Do not use homemade salt/sugar drinks as the quantity of salt and sugar has to be exact.

If your child vomits wait 5-10 minutes and then start giving the drinks again but more slowly (for example a spoonful every 2-3 minutes). Use of a syringe can help in younger children who may not be able to take sips.

Note:- *If you suspect that your child is dehydrated or is becoming dehydrated you should seek medical advice urgently.*

Fluids to treat dehydration

If your child is mildly dehydrated this may be treated by giving them rehydration drinks. Your doctor or nurse will advise about how to make up the drinks and about how much to give. The amount can depend on the age and the weight of your child. If you are breast feeding you should continue with this during this time. Otherwise don't give your child any other drinks unless the doctor or nurse has said that this is ok. It is important that your child is rehydrated before they have any solid food.

Sometimes a child may need to be admitted to hospital for treatment if they are dehydrated. Treatment in hospital usually involves giving rehydration solution via a special tube called a nasogastric tube. This tube passes through your child's nose, down their throat and directly into their stomach. An alternative treatment is with intravenous fluids (fluids given directly into a vein).

Eat as normally as possible once any dehydration has been treated

Correcting any dehydration is the first priority. However, if your child is not dehydrated (most cases) or once any dehydration has been corrected then encourage your child to have their normal diet. Do not starve a child with diarrhoea. This used to be advised but is now known to be wrong so:-

- *Breast fed babies* should continue to be breast fed if they will take it. This will usually be in addition to extra rehydration drinks (described above).
- *Bottle fed babies* should be fed with their normal full strength feeds if they will take it. Again this will usually be in addition to extra rehydration drinks (described above).
- *Older children* – offer them some food every now and then. However, if he or she does not want to eat, that is fine. Drinks are the most important and food can wait until their appetite returns.

Medication is not usually needed

Medicines are not normally given to stop diarrhoea to children under 12 years old. They sound attractive remedies but are unsafe to give to children due to possible serious complications. However, you can give paracetamol or ibuprofen to ease a high temperature or headache. There is also a medicine which can be given to reduce the amount of fluid that is secreted into the gut. This will make the stool more solid. It is used along with rehydration medicines. It can be used in babies and children from 3 months of age.

If symptoms are severe or persist for several days or more, a doctor may ask for a sample of the diarrhoea. This is sent to the laboratory to look for infecting germs (bacteria, parasites etc). Sometimes an antibiotic or other treatment is needed depending on the cause of the infection.

ACUTE DIARRHOEA IN ADULTS

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF ACUTE INFECTIOUS DIARRHOEA?

- The main symptom is diarrhoea often with vomiting as well. Diarrhoea means loose or watery stools (faeces). Usually at least 3 times in 24 hours. Blood or mucus can appear in the stools with some infections.
- Crampy pains in your abdomen (tummy) are common. Pains may ease for a while each time you pass some diarrhoea.
- A high temperature (fever), headache and aching limbs sometimes occur.

If vomiting occurs it often lasts only a day or so but sometimes longer. Diarrhoea often continues after the vomiting stops and commonly lasts for several days or more. Slightly loose stools may persist for another week or so before a normal pattern returns. Sometimes the symptoms last longer.

DO I NEED ANY TESTS?

Most people with acute infectious diarrhoea do not need to see a doctor or seek medical advice. Symptoms are often quite mild and commonly get better within a few days without any medical treatment.

However, in some circumstances you may need to see a doctor (see below about when to seek medical advice). The doctor may ask you various questions. For example, about recent travel abroad, if you have been in contact with someone with similar symptoms, if you have recently taken antibiotics or been admitted to hospital. This is to look for possible causes of your diarrhoea. The doctor will also usually examine you, especially looking for signs of dehydration.

Tests are not usually needed. However, if you are particularly unwell, have bloody stools, have recently travelled abroad, are admitted to hospital or your symptoms are not getting better, then your doctor may ask you to collect a stool sample. This can then be examined in the laboratory to look for the cause of the infection.

WHEN SHOULD I SEEK MEDICAL ADVICE?

Seek medical advice in any of the following situations or if any other symptoms occur that you are concerned about:-

- If you suspect that you are becoming dehydrated.
- If you are vomiting a lot and unable to keep fluids down.
- If you have blood in your diarrhoea or vomit.

- If you have severe abdominal pain.
- If you have severe symptoms, or if you feel that your condition is getting worse.
- If you have a persisting high fever.
- If your symptoms are not settling – for example vomiting for more than 1-2 days, or diarrhoea that does not start to settle after 3-4 days.
- Infections caught abroad.
- If you are elderly or have an underlying health problem such as diabetes, epilepsy, inflammatory bowel disease, kidney disease.
- If you have a weakened immune system because of – for example chemotherapy treatment, long term steroid treatment, HIV infection.
- If you are pregnant.

WHAT IS THE TREATMENT FOR INFECTIOUS DIARRHOEA IN ADULTS?

Symptoms often settle within a few days or so as your immune system usually clears the infection. Occasionally admission to hospital is needed if symptoms are severe or if complications develop (see below).

The following are commonly advised until symptoms ease:-

Fluids – have lots to drink

The aim is to prevent dehydration or to treat dehydration if it has developed. (Note:- if you suspect that you are dehydrated you should contact a doctor.

- As a rough guide drink at least 200mls after each bout of diarrhoea (after each watery stool).
- This extra fluid is in addition to what you would normally drink. For example an adult will normally drink about two litres a day, but more in hot countries. The above advice of 200mls after each bout of diarrhoea is in addition to this usual amount that you would drink.
- If you vomit wait 5-10 minutes and then start drinking again, but more slowly. For example a sip every 2-3 minutes, but making sure that your total intake is as described above.
- You will need to drink even more if you are dehydrated. A doctor will advise on how much to drink if you are dehydrated.

For most adults fluids drunk to keep hydrated should mainly be water, but ideally include some soup. It is best not to have drinks that contain a lot of sugar such as cola or pop, as they can sometimes make diarrhoea worse.

PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF INFECTION TO OTHERS

Some infections causing diarrhoea are very easily passed on from person to person. If you have acute diarrhoea the following are also recommended to prevent the spread of infection to others:-

- Wash your hands thoroughly after going to the toilet. Ideally use liquid soap in warm running water, but any soap is better than none. Dry properly after washing.
- Don't share towels and flannels.
- Don't prepare or serve food for others.
- Regularly clean the toilets that you use. Wipe the flush handle, toilet seat, bathroom taps, surfaces and door handles with hot water and detergent at least once a day. Keep a cloth just for cleaning the toilet (or use a disposable one each time).
- Stay off work, school, college etc until at least 48 hours after the last episode of diarrhoea or vomiting.
- Food handlers:- if you work with food and develop diarrhoea or vomiting, you must immediately leave the food handling area. For most, no other measures are needed other than staying away from work until at least 48 hours after the last episode or diarrhoea or vomiting. Some special situations may arise and sometimes longer time off work is needed. Specialist advice may be needed for some uncommon causes of infectious diarrhoea. If in doubt seek advice from your employer or GP.
- If the cause of acute diarrhoea is known to be (or suspected to be) a germ called *Cryptosporidium spp*, you should not swim in swimming pools for two weeks after the last episode of diarrhoea.

Rehydration drinks are recommended for people who are frail or over the age of 60, or who have underlying health problems. They are made from sachets that you can buy from chemists (the sachets are also available on prescription). You add the contents of the sachet to water. Rehydration drinks provide a good balance of water,

salts and sugar. They do not stop or reduce diarrhoea. However, the small amount of sugar and salt helps the water to be absorbed better from the gut into the body. Do not use homemade salt/sugar drinks as the quantity of salt and sugar has to be exact.

Eat as normally as possible

It used to be advised to not eat for a while if you had infectious diarrhoea. However, now it is advised to eat small, light meals if you can. Be guided by your appetite. You may not feel like food and most adults can do without food for a few days. Eat as soon as you are able – but don't stop drinking. If you do feel like eating, avoid fatty, spicy or heavy food at first. Plain foods such as wholemeal bread and rice are good foods to try eating first.

WHERE TO LOOK FOR EXTRA ADVICE AND UPDATED NEWS.....

When Should I Worry? – your guide to coughs, colds, earache and sore throat is a guide to help you manage the common illnesses which children get which sometimes cause parents to worry. Download this really useful guide, full of excellent advice, from www.whenshouldiworry.com – it will help you make your child more comfortable and guide you as to when you might need to see your doctor.

Stay well

There's no need to worry about the winter months if you wrap up warm and are prepared. The 'Stay Well' campaign at www.nhsstaywell.org will help you enjoy them. Keep dropping by to see new information and advice being added and updated. Make sure this website is your new winter friend!

When you should go to A&E

Did you know every year millions of people go to A & E when they don't need to? Make sure your visit is **really** necessary or you could either face a lengthy wait or stop someone who really needs the service from being seen. There are times when you will need to go to your local accident and emergency (A&E) department. You should attend if you have a life-threatening condition such as:

- choking
- chest pain
- severe bleeding that cannot be stopped
- loss of consciousness
- breathing difficulties
- if the patient is in an acute confused state or experiencing fits that cannot be stopped

But remember – be extra mindful when it is a child or an elderly person who suddenly becomes ill.

.....At all other times when the surgery is closed ring 111



**when it's less
urgent than 999**