

Viral Respiratory Infection: Care Instructions



Overview

A viral respiratory infection is an infection of the nose, sinuses, or throat caused by a virus. Colds and the flu are common types of viral respiratory infections.

The symptoms of a viral respiratory infection often start quickly. They include a fever, sore throat, and runny nose. You may also just not feel well. Or you may not want to eat much.

Most viral infections can be treated with home care. This may include drinking lots of fluids and taking over-the-counter pain medicine. You will probably feel better in 4 to 10 days.

Antibiotics are not used to treat a viral infection. Antibiotics don't kill viruses, so they won't help cure a viral illness.

In some cases, a doctor may prescribe antiviral medicine to help your body fight a serious viral infection.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

How can you care for yourself at home?

- To prevent dehydration, drink plenty of fluids. Choose water and other clear liquids until you feel better. If you have kidney, heart, or liver disease and have to limit fluids, talk with your doctor before you increase the amount of fluids you drink.
- Ask your doctor if you can take an over-the-counter pain medicine, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), or naproxen (Aleve). Be safe with medicines. Read and follow all instructions on the label. No one younger than 20 should take aspirin. It has been linked to Reye syndrome, a serious illness.
- Be careful when taking over-the-counter cold or flu medicines and Tylenol at the same time. Many of these medicines have acetaminophen, which is Tylenol. Read the labels to make sure that you are not taking more than the recommended dose. Too much acetaminophen (Tylenol) can be harmful.

- Get plenty of rest.
- Use saline (saltwater) nasal washes to help keep your nasal passages open and wash out mucus and allergens. You can buy saline nose sprays at a grocery store or drugstore. Follow the instructions on the package. Or you can make your own at home. Add 1 teaspoon of non-iodized salt and 1 teaspoon of baking soda to 2 cups of distilled or boiled and cooled water. Fill a squeeze bottle or neti pot with the nasal wash. Then put the tip into your nostril, and lean over the sink. With your mouth open, gently squirt the liquid. Repeat on the other side.
- Use a vaporizer or humidifier to add moisture to your bedroom. Follow the instructions for cleaning the machine.
- Do not smoke or allow others to smoke around you. If you need help quitting, talk to your doctor about stop-smoking programs and medicines. These can increase your chances of quitting for good.

When should you call for help?



Call 911 anytime you think you may need emergency care. For example, call if:

- You have severe trouble breathing.

Call your doctor now or seek immediate medical care if:

- You have a new or higher fever.
- Your fever lasts more than 48 hours.
- You have trouble breathing.
- You have a fever with a stiff neck or a severe headache.
- You are sensitive to light.
- You feel very sleepy or confused.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- You do not get better as expected.

Where can you learn more?

Go to <https://www.healthwise.net/PatientEd>

Enter **Q795** in the search box to learn more about "**Viral Respiratory Infection: Care Instructions**".

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