**12 Natural Treatment Tips for Colds and Flu**

## **#1 Know When not to Treat Symptoms:** Believe it or not, those annoying symptoms you're experiencing are part of the natural healing process -- evidence that the immune system is battling illness. For instance, a fever is your body's way of trying to kill viruses by creating a hotter-than-normal environment. Also, a fever's hot environment makes germ-killing proteins in your [blood](http://www.webmd.com/heart/anatomy-picture-of-blood) circulate more quickly and effectively. Thus, if you endure a moderate fever for a day or two, you may actually get well faster. [Coughing](http://www.webmd.com/first-aid/coughs) is another productive symptom; it clears your breathing passages of thick mucus that can carry germs to your [lungs](http://www.webmd.com/lung/picture-of-the-lungs) and the rest of your body. Even that stuffy nose is best treated mildly or not at all. A [decongestant](http://www.webmd.com/allergies/guide/decongestants), like [Sudafed](http://www.webmd.com/drugs/2/drug-6573/sudafed+oral/details), restricts flow to the [blood](http://www.webmd.com/a-to-z-guides/rm-quiz-blood-basics) vessels in your nose and throat. But often you *want* the increase blood flow because it warms the infected area and helps secretions carry germs out of your body.

## **#2 Blow Your Nose Often (and the Right Way):** It's important to blow your nose regularly when you have a cold rather than sniffling mucus back into your head. But when you blow hard, pressure can carry germ-carrying phlegm back into your ear passages, causing [earache](http://www.webmd.com/cold-and-flu/cold-guide/earache-cold-ear-infection). The best way to blow your nose: Press a finger over one nostril while you blow *gently* to clear the other.

## **#3 Treat That Stuffy Nose With Warm Salt Water:** Salt-water rinsing helps break nasal congestion, while also removing virus particles and bacteria from your nose. Here's a popular recipe: Mix 1/4 teaspoon salt and 1/4 teaspoon [baking soda](http://www.webmd.com/a-to-z-guides/baking-soda-do-dont) in 8 ounces of warm water. Use a bulb syringe or [nasal irrigation](http://www.webmd.com/allergies/neti-pots) kit to squirt water into the nose. Hold one nostril closed by applying light finger pressure while squirting the salt mixture into the other nostril. Let it drain. Repeat two to three times, then treat the other nostril.

## **#4 Stay Warm and Rested:** Staying warm and resting when you first come down with a cold or the [flu](http://www.webmd.com/cold-and-flu/default.htm) helps your body direct its energy toward the immune battle. This battle taxes the body. So give it a little help by resting.

## **#5 Gargle:** Gargling can moisten a [sore throat](http://www.webmd.com/cold-and-flu/understanding-sore-throat-basics) and bring temporary relief. Gargle with half a teaspoon of salt dissolved in 8 ounces warm water, four times daily. To reduce the tickle in your throat, try an astringent gargle -- such as tea that contains tannin -- to tighten the membranes. Or use a thick, viscous gargle made with honey or honey and [apple cider vinegar](http://www.webmd.com/diet/obesity/features/apple-cider-vinegar-and-health). Seep one tablespoon of raspberry leaves or lemon juice in two cups of hot water; mix with one teaspoon of honey. Let the mixture cool to room temperature before gargling.

## **#6 Drink Hot Liquids:** Hot liquids relieve nasal congestion, prevent [dehydration](http://www.webmd.com/a-to-z-guides/dehydration-adults), and soothe the uncomfortably inflamed membranes that line your nose and throat. If you're so congested that you can't [sleep](http://www.webmd.com/sleep-disorders/default.htm) at night, try a hot toddy, an age-old remedy. Make a cup of hot herbal tea. Add one teaspoon of honey and one small shot (about 1 ounce) of whiskey or bourbon. Limit yourself to one. Too much alcohol will inflame the membranes and make you feel worse.

## **#7 Take a Steamy Shower:** Steamy showers moisturize your nasal passages and may help you relax. If you're dizzy from the [flu](http://www.webmd.com/cold-and-flu/ss/slideshow-flu-symptoms-treatment), run a steamy shower while you sit on a chair nearby and take a sponge bath.

## **#8 Use a Salve Under Your Nose:** A small dab of mentholated salve under your nose can help to open breathing passages and restore the irritated [skin](http://www.webmd.com/skin-problems-and-treatments/picture-of-the-skin) at the base of the nose. Menthol, eucalyptus, and camphor all have mild numbing ingredients that may help relieve the pain of a nose rubbed raw. However, only put it on the outside, under your nose, not inside your nose.

## **#9 Apply Hot or Cold Packs Around Your Congested Sinuses:** Either temperature works. You can buy reusable hot or cold packs at a drugstore or make your own. You can apply heat by taking a damp washcloth and heating it for 55 seconds in a microwave (test the temperature first to make sure it's not too hot.) A small bag of frozen peas works well as a cold pack.

## **#10 Sleep With an Extra Pillow Under Your Head:** Elevating your head will help relieve congested nasal passages. If the angle is too awkward, try placing the pillows between the mattress and the box springs to create a more gradual slope.

## **#11 Don't Fly Unless Necessary:** There's no point adding stress to your already stressed-out upper [respiratory system](http://www.webmd.com/lung/how-we-breathe), and that's what the change in air pressure will do. Flying with cold or [flu](http://www.webmd.com/cold-and-flu/rm-quiz-flu-myths) congestion can temporarily damage your eardrums as a result of pressure changes during takeoff and landing. If you must fly, use a [decongestant](http://www.webmd.com/allergies/indoor-outdoor-relief-14/video-decongestants-vs-antihistamines) and carry a nasal spray with you to use just before takeoff and landing. Chewing gum and swallowing frequently can also help relieve pressure.

## **#12 Eat Infection-Fighting Foods:** Here are some good foods to eat when you're battling a cold or [flu](http://www.webmd.com/cold-and-flu/video/myths-and-facts-about-flu):

* Bananas and rice to soothe an [upset stomach](http://www.webmd.com/digestive-disorders/digestive-diseases-nausea-vomiting) and curb [diarrhea](http://www.webmd.com/digestive-disorders/digestive-diseases-diarrhea)
* [Vitamin C](http://www.webmd.com/vitamins-supplements/ingredientmono-1001-vitamin+c+ascorbic+acid.aspx?activeingredientid=1001&activeingredientname=vitamin+c+(ascorbic+acid))-containing foods like bell peppers
* Blueberries curb diarrhea and are high in natural [aspirin](http://www.webmd.com/drugs/mono-3-ASPIRIN+-+ORAL.aspx?drugid=1082&drugname=Aspirin+Oral), which may lower [fevers](http://www.webmd.com/first-aid/fevers-causes-symptoms-treatments) and help with aches and pains
* Carrots, which contain beta-carotene
* Chili peppers may open [sinuses](http://www.webmd.com/allergies/picture-of-the-sinuses), and help break up mucus in the [lungs](http://www.webmd.com/lung/rm-quiz-lungs-quiz)
* Cranberries may help prevent bacteria from sticking to cells lining the [bladder](http://www.webmd.com/urinary-incontinence-oab/picture-of-the-bladder) and urinary tract
* Mustard or horseradish may helps break up mucus in air passages
* Onions contain phytochemicals purported to help the body clear [bronchitis](http://www.webmd.com/lung/understanding-bronchitis-basics) and other infections
* Black and [green tea](http://www.webmd.com/food-recipes/features/health-benefits-of-green-tea) contain catechin, a phytochemical purported to have natural antibiotic and anti-diarrhea effects

Remember, serious conditions, such as [sinus](http://www.webmd.com/allergies/video/sinus-function-breathing) infections, [bronchitis](http://www.webmd.com/lung/ss/slideshow-bronchitis-overview), [meningitis](http://www.webmd.com/children/understanding-meningitis-basics), [strep throat](http://www.webmd.com/oral-health/understanding-strep-throat-basics), and [asthma](http://www.webmd.com/asthma/default.htm), can look like the [common cold](http://www.webmd.com/cold-and-flu/ss/slideshow-cold-or-flu). If you have severe symptoms, or don't seem to be getting better, call your doctor.