

# Colds

## Upper respiratory infections

What you call a cold your doctor calls an “upper respiratory infection.” Why? A cold is an infection that settles in the nose and throat — the upper respiratory tract. Healthy children can have as many as six to 12 colds per year, each cold lasting up to two weeks, until they develop a resistance to the common viruses that cause colds.

## Cold symptoms

Symptoms aren’t all the same. One time, your child may have a runny nose that lasts a few days. Another time, she may have watery eyes, a runny nose that lasts for a week or more, and a cough. Usually the first sign of a cold is sneezing, followed by a very runny nose. Children often are irritable, lose their appetites, and have a low fever. Most colds are caused by a virus, so there is no way to cure a cold. You can only treat its symptoms and decrease your child’s discomfort. Antibiotics are not helpful for most colds.

### Some suggestions to help your child feel better:

- Give more clear fluids (juice, water, broth) — not milk — to help thin the mucus.
- Don’t push solid foods. Your child will be less hungry during a cold.
- Increase the humidity in your child’s room. This helps keep nasal secretions moist so they will flow out the nose. Otherwise they may become dry and give the feeling of a “stuffed” nose.
- Use a cool air humidifier. Clean it every day by washing it in hot, soapy water. Then, at least once a week, wash it with hot, soapy water; place a towel in the opening; fill it with water; add one capful of bleach; and run it outside of the child’s room for one hour. Rinse all the bleach solution out before running it in the child’s room again. If it is not cleaned daily, the humidifier could spread germs and molds.
- NEVER use a hot steam vaporizer for children with colds. They are very dangerous because they can cause serious burns to children.
- Children do not know how to breathe through their mouths. They become panicky when their nose is congested, especially during feeding. To help your child breathe, you may use saline (salt water) nose drops that you buy at a pharmacy or you can make your own drops by mixing:
  - 1/2 teaspoon salt and 1 cup of warm water

With your child lying on his back, put two drops in one nostril, let soak for about 30-60 seconds, and then gently suction out any mucus with a rubber bulb syringe. Repeat for the other nostril. Use the nose drops half an hour before each meal and before bedtime.

Most children will protest having the drops and syringe inserted in their nose. This is normal. You can respond by talking gently to your child and reassuring her that she will feel better soon after the drops “work.”
- To help your child sleep better, raise the head of your child’s bed or crib. You can do this by inserting a pillow under the mattress or placing a book or board under the legs of the head of the bed. NEVER put a pillow loose inside the crib with an infant or small child. It is a suffocation hazard.
- If your child has a fever, measured in the armpit and higher than 100.4°F (or 38°C), you may want to give him some medication to make him more comfortable and bring down his temperature. See the “Treatment of fevers” information sheet to learn how to treat your child’s fever.

### **Call your child's clinic or doctor if your child...**

- Doesn't get better or looks sicker after 48 hours.
- Starts to have a hard time breathing.
- Breathes much faster than normal.
- Eats poorly or tires easily when feeding.
- Has a fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, and is 3 months or younger.
- Has a fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher that lasts for more than 24 hours, and is younger than 2 years.
- Pulls at the ears or shakes the head.
- Drinks less than usual.

### **Tips for staying healthy**

Frequent hand washing is the most important way to prevent the spread of colds. All family members should:

- Wash hands well after blowing their nose and before touching or eating food.
- Avoid touching their nose and eyes.
- Not share food, beverages, or towels.
- Cover their mouth with their forearm when they sneeze or cough.
- Wash the baby's or toddler's hands often.