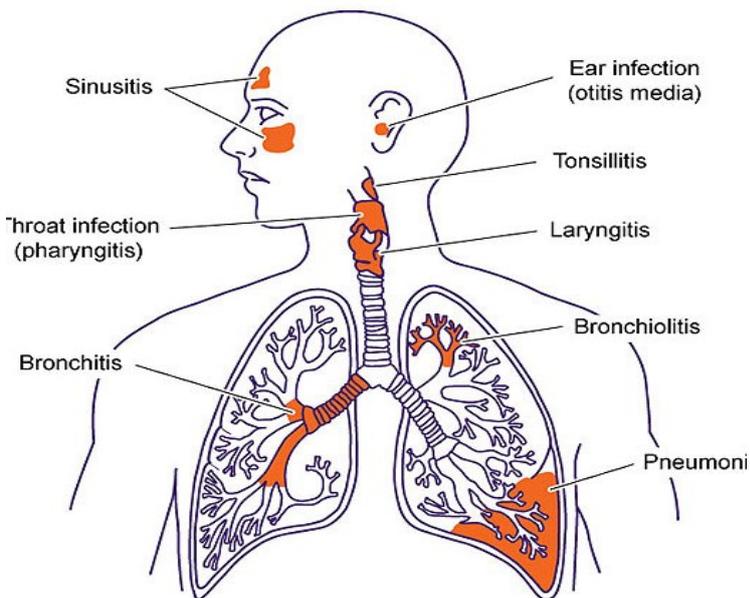


## Winter maladies & remedies: fact or fiction

In general most people will experience between 2-5 colds over a year. These can range from mild irritations to illnesses that will need actions to recuperate and recover. Common colds are also known as upper respiratory tract infections (URTI) and are caused by viruses that we breathe in or come in contact with via hard surfaces, money, or via hand to hand contact. The viruses, most commonly rhinovirus, adenovirus, and coronavirus or 1 of 200 other different types, are able to cross over mucous membranes of our upper airways, enter cells and begin to reproduce causing irritation of our airways in particular the nasal passages, throat, sinuses and bronchi. Occasionally a URTI can be caused by a bacterial infection, however this is in the minority of cases. However bacterial infections can occur as a secondary infection if the URTI fails to respond to immune defences and management.

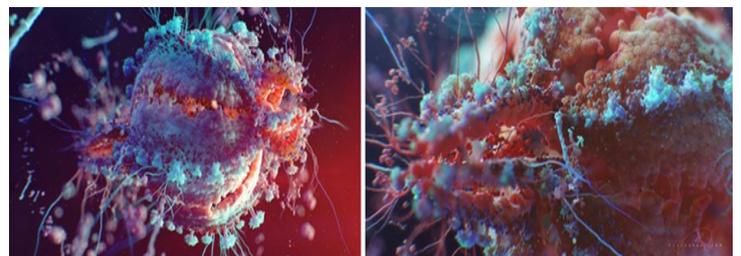


It can be difficult to identify whether the causative agent is viral or bacterial in origin. Tell-tale symptoms don't always hold true. For example, it has often been said that the presence of green phlegm or "snot" is a sign of bacterial infection however, this does not hold true as the colour is more of a reflection of the length of time the mucus has been present. The length of time of infection symptom progression can be a helpful guide with bacterial infections often coming on quickly and generally staying in one site. Viral infections have a tendency to take longer, with symptoms progressing from a first site and symptom to others that

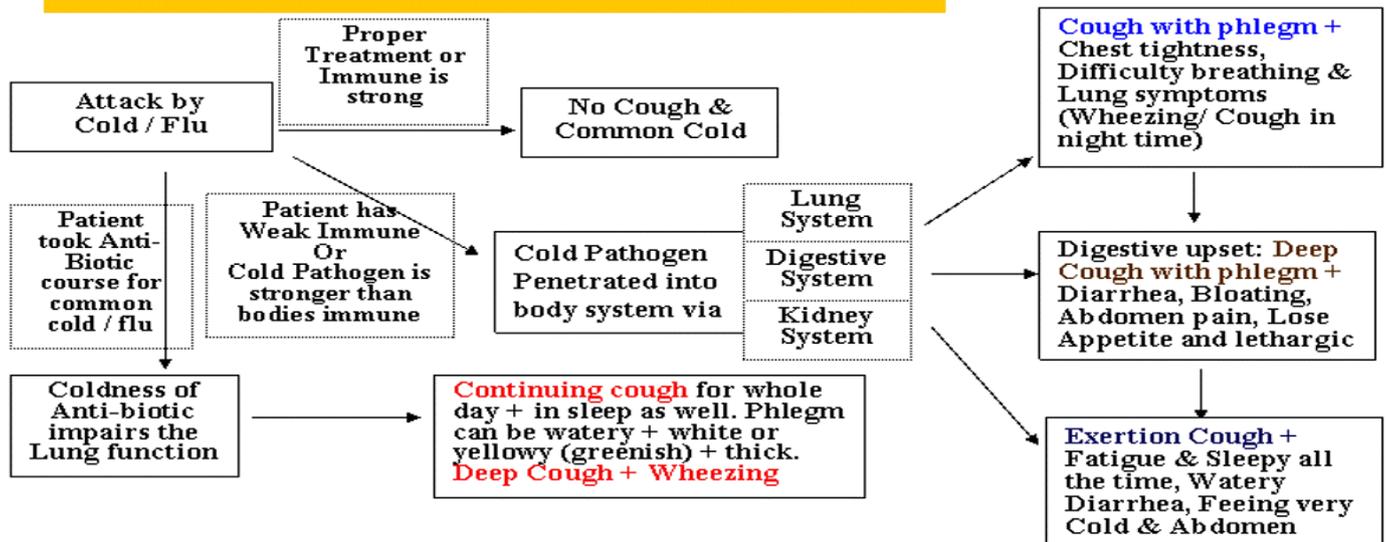
can be quite widespread across the body. Definitive microbial origin can be found through testing of phlegm samples for species type, however if symptoms persist and fever, in particular, returns then a secondary illness could have developed and may need medical intervention and antibiotic treatment.

From the point of microbial contact it can take a few days until airway irritation reaches a point where symptoms begin to appear. Symptoms vary and are dependent on the site of infection including stuffy and runny noses, sore throats, cough, and a hoarse voice if the voice box is inflamed. Symptoms of swollen glands in the neck, fever, headaches and fatigue are also common. Symptoms can change over time as the effects of the infection travels through the airways, often beginning as a sore throat moving to upper airways resulting in irritation of the bronchi and the symptom of coughing with and without increased mucus production.

The immune system can take a few days to call its defence systems into play with T cells and B cells working to overpower and expel the microbial invaders. Defence mechanisms can include sneezing and coughing which is the body's way of moving secretions such as phlegm upwards to allow efficient removal. Defence system activation and operation can take longer in people with an autoimmune illness (AI) and it is important that people with AI monitor their symptoms and recovery time as infection and post infection can cause an exacerbation of autoimmune symptoms or flare event. It is also important to note that difficulty in expelling increased mucus, and coping with respiratory irritation when coughing is heightened, can be increased in people that have conditions such as asthma or those that have lung involvement as part of their AI symptom spectrum.



## Cough & Common Cold Pathogen's Penetration Pathway



Remedies are commonly drawn from a mixture of medical evidence, ancient cures, family tradition and social sharing of anecdotal symptom treatment success and experiences. Many can help alleviate symptom impacts in the short term however overall treatment that provides the best results include maintaining a warm body, getting plenty of rest and drinking plenty of fluids. It is advisable that to prevent sharing of germs take some time to recover, thoroughly clean items you are in contact with in particular those that are shared such as cups, utensils, telephones, remote controls, taps and doorknobs. Use and dispose of tissues or cloths used for nasal drips and coughing rather than using handkerchiefs which are often keep sakes. Try to expel the microbes from your airways and nasal passage; this can involve coughing up mucus and phlegm rather than swallowing mucus; and blowing your nose often. Common logic would dictate that nose and mouth coverage will help protect against spreading the microbe party. Regularly wash hands with soap or alcohol wash. Antibiotics are not helpful against viruses but can be if the microbe is bacterial and a secondary infection has occurred. In most cases the length of illness is not shortened by antibiotics.



Over the counter remedies, can help ease symptoms however some immune boosting preparations should be avoided by those with AI particularly those containing Echinacea or Astragalus. These herbs have been found to interact with AI standard treatments and are not advised to be taken. Many over the counter medication can suppress natural immune fighting responses with little evidence of shortening the length of illness.

Expectorants can help to break up sticky mucus and make it easier to cough and expel. Throat lozenges can soothe a sore throat and mentholated rubs and steam baths can help to warm the body and free blocked airways.

### Common remedies:



- Saltwater rinsing of nasal passages with or without the use of a neti pot has been shown to break nasal congestion.
- Gargling of salt water or more astringent liquids such as tea, apple cider vinegar, lemon juice helps to moisten the throat and tighten membranes.
- Drinking hot liquids prevent dehydration, relieve nasal congestion and soothe irritated membranes. The addition of honey is thought to soothe throats by providing a soothing coat. The additions of brandy or whiskey has been used as a means to ease the throat and help promote sleep; however use sparingly as alcohol can also increase the inflammation of the membranes and make you feel worse.



Try warmed apple juice, peppermint tea, ginger tea or lemon and honey drinks.



·Eating warm soups adds nutrition whilst also increases liquid intake preventing dehydration. The eating of soft foods will also prevent further irritating mucus membranes and are thought to ease congestion over time by increasing mucus flow.

Steamy showers, baths, vaporizers, humidifiers and steam pots with menthol or eucalyptus add moisture to air and can loosen congestion in airways. Be careful of burns and also make sure equipment is regularly cleaned to prevent cross contamination with other microbes.

·Menthol, eucalyptus, camphor all have properties that can help open nasal passages these can be used as a salve under your nose, on your pillow or as a sachet attached to pyjamas.

Sleep with an extra pillow so that you are more upright

Apply hot and cold packs on congested sinuses to relieve pressure and headaches.

Sage tea with honey has been suggested to help with inflamed larynx, hoarse voice and throat irritation as a result of colds. Sage tea has also been reported to help with excessive sweating as a result of infections and also AI and menopausal symptoms.

Aches, pains and fever can be treated with rest and also medications with analgesic properties such as paracetamol and ibuprofen.

Vitamin and mineral supplements such as Vitamin C and zinc have been reported to have benefits however there is limited scientific evidence.



- Likewise the evidence for increasing “infection-fighting” foods is limited however they are commonly included in diets for their anecdotal health improvement properties. Foods such as garlic, chilli peppers, mustard, horse radish, onions are thought to help break up mucus and open sinuses. Blueberries are reported to be high in natural aspirin which may lower fevers and ease aches and pains. Blueberries along with bananas and rice also soothe an upset stomach and curb diarrhoea that can result from colds.
- Honey coats the throat, triggers the swallowing mechanism, changing the sensitivity of sensory fibres it is also reported to calm a cough and reduce a cough’s severity, frequency and annoyance. Both the World health organisation and a large US study recommend honey as an effective remedy more effective at treating night-time cough than the placebo. Honey contains more than 181 different natural substances with antioxidant and antimicrobial properties.

Symptoms are part of your bodies defence mechanism and are a way of fighting the infection. Fever is your body’s way of trying to kill the virus and allows helpful proteins to circulate within the blood more quickly. Coughing and a runny nose clear the airways and nasal passage of thick mucus and other secretions that if not expelled can carry germs to the rest of your body in particular the lungs.

If your illness does not improve after 7-10 days; if symptoms worsen or if any of the following symptoms are present then you should seek directed medical support: Breathing difficulties; high persistent fever over 39°C even with paracetamol; discharge from ears; severe headache; and importantly a rash or mottled skin. It also important for those that have AI to have an annual flu shot. For more information on immunisation please see [www.immunise.health.gov.au](http://www.immunise.health.gov.au)

#### Source information:

1. Health Direct Australia [www.healthdirect.gov.au](http://www.healthdirect.gov.au)
2. ABC health & Wellbeing [www.abc.net.au/health](http://www.abc.net.au/health)
3. [www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/common-cold](http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/common-cold) Cold remedies: what works, what doesn’t, what can’t hurt
4. [www.webmd.com/cold-and-flu/12-tips-prevent-colds-flu](http://www.webmd.com/cold-and-flu/12-tips-prevent-colds-flu) WebMD 2014 12 natural treatment tips for colds and flu.