

Making Sense of the Symptoms

Both a cold and the flu are infections that typically affect the respiratory tract. They are caused by viruses, which means they can't be cured by an antibiotic. One of the best ways to help fight the common cold or the respiratory symptoms of the flu is with plenty of fluids and rest.

Here are a few of the common respiratory symptoms related to the cold, flu and bacterial infections. If any symptoms worsen or continue – call your doctor.

Signs and Symptoms	Cold	Flu	Bacterial infections of the respiratory tract
Onset	Gradual	Sudden	Gradual; occasionally acute
Fever	Rare	Typical – high (over 101° F) and lasting 3 to 4 days	Typical – high (over 101° F)
Cough	Hacking	Nonproductive; can become severe	Can be dry or productive
Headache	Rare	Prominent	Sometimes
Myalgia (aching muscles)	Slight	Usual; often severe	Sometimes
Fatigue, weakness	Very mild	Can last up to 2 to 3 weeks	Common
Extreme exhaustion	Rare	Early and prominent	Rare
Chest discomfort	None	Common	Common
Stuffy nose	Common	Sometimes	Sometimes
Sneezing	Usual	Sometimes	Rare
Sore throat	Common	Sometimes	Sometimes

Cold or Flu? Why not try to avoid them both!

Here are a few tips to help you avoid coming in contact with common cold and flu viruses:

- If you know someone has a cold or the flu, give them plenty of space. The virus is spread through airborne transmission or personal contact.
- Wash your hands often.
- Avoid sharing mugs, cups, utensils or towels.
- Eat a well-balanced, healthy diet and drink plenty of water and get a good night's sleep.
- Get a flu shot if you are age 50 or older, have a weakened immune system, have certain chronic health problems, or if you will be pregnant during flu season.

Independent Health's 24-Hour Medical Help Line*

Reach a registered nurse to answer any questions and concerns – anytime, day or night. Call the 24-Hour Medical Help Line at 1-800-501-3439.

*24-Hour Medical Help Line should not be used for diagnosis or as a substitute for a physician's advice.