

Cold, Congestion and Cough Home Treatment

Iowa State University

Thielen Student Health Center



It can be uncomfortable and frustrating when we are coughing, have chest or nasal congestion and have difficulty with taking deep breaths or breathing through our nose and have general congestion from upper respiratory concerns.

Some things to remember and to help our symptoms to not feel so bad, as well as, possibly keep from getting worse are:

- Get plenty of rest; when we are already tired and fatigued our bodies can take even longer to recover from any illnesses.
- Increase your fluids, drinking at least 2-3 liters of water daily, to help to stay hydrated and to also keep the sputum/phlegm you may be coughing up, loose and able to move more freely and not get stuck in your lungs.
- Sipping warm chicken broth, drinking warm tea with lemon and honey, apple juice, gargling with salt water and using throat lozenges, can help with throat pain
- Try to avoid milk or creamy liquids, as they can cause more phlegm and sputum.
- Using a humidifier or vaporizer at night while sleeping to keep air moist, a hot steamy shower can break up some tighter congestion, saline wash or nose drops can help with nasal congestion.
- Use of a decongestant to help with congestion of that is a concern; ***if there is a history of hypertension, asthma, heart disease, glaucoma, prostate or pregnancy, talk to your PCP or a pharmacist prior to taking.***
- Using an antihistamine can be helpful if congestion is due to allergies
- An expectorant can be used for a cough (check with your pharmacist to decide on which one would work best with your symptoms); keep in mind that a cough could last 2-3 weeks, sometimes longer; but should improve somewhat, every 4-5 days
- For sinus pain/congestion, inhale the mist from peppermint tea, it has anti-inflammatory compounds and pain relievers like menthol that can relax constricted sinuses.
- Using a sinus wash can help to keep sinus passages clear and possibly avoid getting thick and infected; sinus wash kits are available at most pharmacies and need no prescription; follow individual package directions.
- ***If you have any chronic health concerns that are followed by a provider, such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease, thyroid disorders, hypertension, please contact a provider to assess if you should be seen sooner than those who are otherwise healthy.***

SIGNS TO WATCH FOR AND CONTACT A PROVIDER:

- Fever greater than 101 degrees for more than 3 days
- Sore throat that last longer than 3 days
- Persistent earache, sinus pain or yellow eye drainage
- Nasal discharge lasting longer than 10 days
- Productive cough and/or nasal discharge producing green or yellow sputum

EMERGENCY SIGNS TO WATCH FOR:

- Unable to swallow own saliva
- Difficulty breathing
- Chest pain
- Excessive drooling
- Unable to open mouth fully

If you have any questions or concerns consult your provider or contact the Thielen Student Health Center at (515) 294-5801.