

Natural Cold Remedies: What Works, What Doesn't

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Colds and the flu are caused by viruses, which means antibiotics are not effective treatments and can actually lengthen the time you are sick
- › There are many different ways you can shorten the amount of time you suffer with a virus and help prevent a recurrence
- › Do not use over-the-counter remedies as they often contain substances now found to suppress your ability to fight the virus and will extend the time you suffer from a cold

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Your nose is running, your eyes are itchy and watery, you have a low-grade fever and you've been sneezing all day. You probably have a cold. They are the leading cause of doctor visits and missed days at work and school. The average adult in America will suffer between two and four colds each year.

Despite advancements in medical care and treatment, traditional western medicine has little to offer in the care and treatment of the common cold. That's because the cold is caused by a virus and not bacteria. This is important because antibiotics work only against bacteria and not against viruses.

Most uncomplicated colds last between two days and two weeks, depending upon the specific virus and your overall general health. Oftentimes over-the-counter cold remedies don't speed your recovery and can actually prolong your suffering.

Many remedies contain aspirin, acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil), all of which may suppress your body's ability to produce antibodies and fight the cold.¹ This is completely opposite of your goal to get better as quickly as possible.

Although your physician may offer antiviral medications, such as Tamiflu, they are not effective against the common cold^{2,3} and carry specific risks worse than the cold they are meant to treat, and may be more ineffective than advertised.

The answer to treating your cold does not lie in the medicine cabinet. Use a combination of lifestyle choices, herbal remedies and vitamin supplementation to fight the virus and support your immune system in defense against viral attacks.

17 Natural Home Remedies

1. **Meditation** – Meditation has significant positive effects on heart rate, brain function, stress reduction and blood pressure.⁴ Research also has demonstrated that mindful meditation, or the practice of purposefully paying attention, has lasting positive effects on brain function and your immune system.⁵

Imaging demonstrated an increase in activation in the left frontal region of the brain associated with lower anxiety, and blood work showed larger increases in antibody production in participants who meditated in the study. Meditation is an option for both treatment and prevention of colds.

2. **Exercise** – If all your symptoms are above your neck, such as sneezing, sniffing and watery eyes, then breaking out in a sweat is generally considered safe. Your immune system functions better when you exercise regularly and is a good preventative measure.⁶

Walking, jogging, yoga and slow biking are among the best exercises when you have a cold, while endurance sports, team sports, weightlifting and exercising in the cold weather are among the worst.⁷

Exercise may help you feel better but may not shorten the length of your cold. If you are involved in strenuous exercise it depletes the energy needed to fight the virus and can actually make your symptoms worse.

- 3. Sleep** — Lack of sleep has been linked to a laundry list of medical disorders from a negative impact on your immune system to dementia.

Sleep has a strong regulatory influence on your immune system and promotes the influence of cytokines stimulating the interaction between antigen-presenting cells and T-helper cells necessary for your body to fight virus infections.⁸

When you're sick (and even when you're not), most people need between about eight hours of sleep a night and plenty of rest during the day.

- 4. Nasal saline rinse** — Although researchers can only speculate how saline nasal washes are effective in treating and preventing virus infections and recurrences, the fact is they are effective.⁹ Use only sterile normal saline water in the rinse.

Tap water can increase the inflammatory response in the sinus passages and carry parasites that can infect your brain.

5. Hydrogen peroxide

In 1928, Dr. Richard Simmons hypothesized that the cold virus entered your body through the ear canal and not the nose. His theory was dismissed by the medical community.

However, in 1938, German researchers had great success using hydrogen peroxide in the ear canal to treat colds and the flu.¹⁰ Although the data was vastly ignored by the medical community, I've treated many patients who experienced great results with this treatment.

You must start treatment in the first 24 hours to have a significant impact on reducing the length of the cold. You can watch more about how I've used this treatment to shorten colds and the flu in the video above.

6. **Apple cider vinegar** – Cold viruses increase the acidity of your body. To fight the virus, take a couple of tablespoons of apple cider vinegar each day. This reduces the acidity and apple cider vinegar has acetic acid that helps prevent the growth of viruses.
7. **Raw honey** – Honey has natural antibacterial and antiviral properties. But, you would have to overdose on the honey in order to achieve the effect of treating the virus in your body.

However, if you suffer from a sore throat with your cold, raw honey is as effective as cough syrup or cough drops. Remember that honey is a natural sugar and taken in large amounts will adversely affect your insulin and leptin levels.

Honey Lemon Cough Syrup

Lemon helps promote health by quickly alkalizing your body, and honey will kill any bacteria. This is a perfect choice for a quick cough remedy.

Directions

1. Put a pint of raw honey in a pan on the stove on VERY low heat (Do not boil honey as this changes its medicinal properties).
2. Take a whole lemon and boil in some water in a separate pan for two to three minutes, to both soften the lemon and kill any bacteria that may be on the lemon skin.
3. Let the lemon cool enough to handle, then cut it in slices and add it to the pint of honey on the stove.
4. Let mixture cook on warm heat for about an hour.
5. Then strain the lemon from the honey, making sure all lemon seeds are removed.
6. Let cool, then bottle in a jar with a lid and store in the refrigerator.

This syrup will keep for two months in the refrigerator. To soothe a cough, take 1/2 teaspoon for a 25-pound child and 1 teaspoon for a 50-pound child, about four times a day, or as often as needed. **Adults can take 1 tablespoon doses.**

8. Chicken soup – Although the biological basis for using chicken soup is unknown, a team of researchers from the University of Nebraska Medical Center found evidence that chicken soup – both homemade and from the can – had anti-inflammatory properties that could prevent the side effects of a cold.¹¹

I'd strongly recommend avoiding the canned varieties in favor of a home-cooked version, however, especially with **homemade broth** to nourish you from the inside out. The next time you make a pot of chicken soup, make some extra to store in the freezer. That way you can pull some out if you're feeling under the weather and not up to cooking.

9. Colloidal silver – Silver has been used in treatments as far back as Hippocrates, who was one of the first to describe its antimicrobial and antibiotic properties. But, because colds and the flu are caused by viruses, using colloidal silver will not be effective.

10. Coconut oil – Coconut oil has both antibacterial and antiviral properties, making it a great addition to your treatment and prevention of colds and the flu.¹² Rub coconut oil over your skin. It is readily absorbed into your body and, as an added benefit, will soften your skin too. Add one-half teaspoon to your coffee or tea when you have a cold and cook with coconut oil.

11. Fermented foods – The health of your immune system resides in your intestines.¹³ Fermented foods provide your intestines with a good variety of bacteria to support your immune system.

While fermented foods will improve the health of your gut and therefore your immune system, it often does not work fast enough to help reduce the length of your current cold. Eating fermented foods is a preventive measure for more than just a cold.

12. Baking soda – The Arm & Hammer Baking Soda Company recommends baking soda to reduce the acidity of your body in the treatment of colds and flu. However, I have pushed the body pH in the opposite direction and achieved the same results, shortening the length of an infection.

The administration of baking soda is simple, relatively harmless and easy to test on your own cold. Simply dissolve the recommended amount of baking soda in a glass of cold water and drink it. Recommended dosages from the Arm & Hammer Company for colds and influenza back in 1925 were:

- **Day 1** – Take six doses of one-half teaspoon of baking soda in glass of cool water, at about two-hour intervals
- **Day 2** – Take four doses of one-half teaspoon of baking soda in glass of cool water, at the same intervals
- **Day 3** – Take two doses of one-half teaspoon of baking soda in glass of cool water morning and evening, and thereafter ½ teaspoon in glass of cool water each morning until cold symptoms are gone

This should only be used as an occasional (not chronic) treatment, however, and be careful not to consume excessive amounts, which can cause serious electrolyte and acid/base imbalances.

13. Lifestyle choices – Other lifestyle choices that will help your body to heal from a cold are to eliminate or drastically reduce your alcohol intake and smoking. Both of these factors negatively impact your immune system, making it more difficult for your body to fight the viral infection.

14. Steam – Steam will not shorten the length of your cold, but it will help to break up the mucous secretions in your sinuses, reduce the inflammation in your nasal passages and help you to breathe better.

15. Stress reduction – Practicing meditation, yoga or [Emotional Freedom Techniques \(EFT\)](#) are simple and effective practices to support your immune system and

prevent other damage caused by stress. Diseases linked to stress include obesity, Alzheimer's disease, depression, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and gastrointestinal problems.¹⁴

- 16. Hand washing** – Hand washing is a deterrent for infection by viruses and against further infection while you are sick. It will also reduce the spread of the virus to other family members, but it will not shorten the length of your cold. Remember that too much hand washing is almost as bad as not enough. Frequent washing strips your skin of protective oils, causing the skin to crack and bleed.
- 17. Eat real food** – Eating real food and avoiding processed foods will give your body the necessary tools to fight a viral infection. It will also reduce the potential you'll suffer a quick recurrence of the infection. Real foods are best described as those found in the outside aisles of the grocery store that require refrigeration to remain fresh.

Eight Vitamins for Colds

- 1. Zinc** – Zinc is nutritionally essential for immune function. Zinc lozenges and powder are available for use during a cold or the flu that can shorten the length of your cold if you have a slight deficiency.¹⁵ Your body uses these micronutrients in a balanced state.

Too much zinc interferes with copper bioavailability and too much iron can reduce your absorption of zinc. Foods rich in zinc include [lobster](#), oysters, beef, crab, pork, cashews, chickpeas, chicken and Swiss cheese.¹⁶

- 2. Vitamin C** – There is evidence that this water-soluble vitamin will shorten the life of your cold. People with higher blood levels also have a lower risk of death from all causes. Typically the higher the dose the better but one is limited to a relatively small amount with oral vitamin C. You can go much higher with IV or liposomal C. I personally use liposomal vitamin C, 2-3 grams every few hours when I am sick, or when friends and family get sick.¹⁷

3. Vitamin D – Research studies have demonstrated that this fat-soluble vitamin is essential to the function of your immune system. However, while important to prevent a cold and the flu, supplementation during a cold may not shorten the length of the illness.¹⁸

That being said, suboptimal vitamin D levels will significantly impair your immune response and make you far more susceptible to contracting colds, flu and other respiratory infections, so it's important to make sure your levels are optimized.

4. Magnesium – The importance of this mineral to your health has previously been underestimated. Researchers have identified a reduction in magnesium levels after strenuous exercise, leading to an increased number of viral infections.^{19,20}

Supplementation during a cold will likely not reduce the length of your cold.

However, an Epsom salt bath will reduce your muscle aches, aid in the absorption of magnesium from the Epsom salts and just make you feel better.

5. Vitamin E – This fat-soluble vitamin enhanced the T-cell-related immune-mediated response in an elderly population. However, while important for prevention, it is not likely to produce immediate results to shorten the length of your cold.

6. Vitamin B6 – This vitamin is essential for the production of over 100 enzymes responsible for protein metabolism. Although important to your health, it does not shorten the length of your cold.

7. Vitamin A – This fat-soluble vitamin is important for the differentiation and regulation of almost every cell in your body, including normal immune function. This vitamin is important for the prevention of colds but will not shorten the length of your cold.²¹

8. Selenium – This trace element is important in a variety of biological functions. However, while a severe deficiency can lead to significant viral infections it is highly unlikely that supplementation during a cold will reduce the length of your cold.²²

11 Herbal Cold Remedies

- 1. Echinacea** – This is one of the most popular Native American medicinal plants. The research using Echinacea tea is not consistent. The studies that demonstrated the best effect at shortening the length of a cold occurred when you drink two to three cups of Echinacea tea per day starting on the first or second day of your cold.²³
- 2. Ginseng and andrographis** – Ginseng is a tuber plant and Andrographis is a plant native to South Asia. Double-blind studies have demonstrated that specific Siberian ginseng and andrographis reduce the length and severity of colds when you take it within 72 hours of the start of your symptoms.²⁴
- 3. Pelargonium sidoides** – Research has demonstrated that this obscure herb can reduce the severity and length of the common cold. Scientists theorize that the herb up-regulates the cytokines in protecting host cells from viral invaders.²⁵
- 4. Raw garlic** – Despite a report from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) that there is little evidence garlic has an effect on the common cold, some studies have found that raw garlic can prevent colds and reduce the severity of the cold you already have.²⁶ Test this for yourself at home (be sure to crush the garlic cloves before eating to release their active medicinal properties).
- 5. Oil of oregano** – This concentrated oil of the oregano plant has potent antibacterial and antiviral effects. In one study, researchers found when in spray form in combination with four other aromatic plants it could immediately reduce the side effects of a cold. This treatment was no longer effective after three days of use. Oil of oregano should not be used by children, women who are pregnant or nursing or who plan to become pregnant.
- 6. Licorice root** – Licorice root is a traditional herbal remedy to treat colds and upper respiratory infections. To date there is no research that supports the use of licorice root to reduce the length of a cold.²⁷

7. **Olive leaf extract** – Widely known as a non-toxic immune system support, there is not sufficient evidence to suggest olive leaf extract will reduce the length or severity of your current cold. A few studies have demonstrated its effectiveness at reducing the infectivity of the virus and reducing the inflammatory response in the body.²⁸
8. **Herbal tea** – Herbal teas from Goldenseal, elderberry, yarrow, boneset, linden, peppermint and ginger may help support your immune system, soothe a sore throat and shorten your cold by up to one or two days.
9. **Curcumin** – This is a powerful antioxidant that lowers the levels of two enzymes that cause inflammation. There is evidence that curcumin fights the cold virus in the test tube. Further, it supports the immune system and is effective in the prevention and treatment of several other diseases.²⁹
10. **Propolis** – This is a substance collected by bees from leaf buds and tree bark. This extract may be helpful in the reduction of the length and severity of your cold. Some clinical trials have reported reduced number of upper respiratory infections and a reduction in the length of the viral illness.³⁰
11. **White willow** – The use of willow bark dates back to the time of Hippocrates when people were advised to chew on the bark of the tree to reduce pain and fever. The chemical properties of the bark are similar to aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid). Pain and fever relief comes more slowly than aspirin but lasts longer. This is a symptom reliever and will not change the length of your cold.³¹

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