Flu Symptoms and Treatment

What are the symptoms of the flu?

Flu symptoms include:

- Body aches, tiredness, and cough.
- A 100°F or higher fever or feeling feverish (not everyone with the flu has a fever)
- A cough and/or sore throat
- A runny or stuffy nose
- Headaches and/or body aches
- Chills
- Fatigue
- Nausea, vomiting, and/or diarrhea (most common in children)

Do I have the flu or a cold?

The flu and the common cold have similar symptoms. It can be difficult to tell the difference between them. Your health care provider can give you a test within the first few days of your illness to determine whether or not you have the flu.

In general, the flu is worse than the common cold. Symptoms such as fever, body aches, tiredness, and cough are more common and intense with the flu. People with colds are more likely to have a runny or stuffy nose.

When should I seek emergency medical attention?

Seek medical attention immediately if you experience any of the following:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Purple or blue discoloration of the lips
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Seizures
- Flu-like symptoms that improve but then return with fever and worse cough
Treatment

If you have been diagnosed with the flu, you should **stay home** and follow your health care provider's recommendations. Talk to your health care provider or pharmacist about over-the-counter and prescription medications to ease flu symptoms and help you feel better faster.

**TREATMENT**
- You can treat flu symptoms with and without medication.
- Over-the-counter medications may relieve some flu symptoms but will not make you less contagious.

**MEDICATION**
- Your health care provider may prescribe antiviral medications to make your illness milder and prevent serious complications.
- Your health care provider may prescribe antibiotics if your flu has progressed to a bacterial infection.

Are there ways to treat the flu or its symptoms without medication?

You can treat flu symptoms without medication by:

- Getting plenty of rest
- Drinking clear fluids like water, broth, sports drinks, or electrolyte beverages to prevent becoming dehydrated
- Placing a cool, damp washcloth on your forehead, arms, and legs to reduce discomfort associated with a fever
- Putting a humidifier in your room to make breathing easier
- Gargling salt water (1:1 ratio warm water to salt) to soothe a sore throat
- Covering up with a warm blanket to calm chills

How can I treat congestion?

Decongestants can ease discomfort from stuffy noses, sinuses, ears, and chests. Talk to your health care provider or pharmacist about which kind is right for you.

How can I treat coughing and sore throat?

Cough medicine, cough drops, and throat lozenges can temporarily relieve coughing and sore throat. Talk to your health care provider or pharmacist about which kind is right for you.
How can I reduce fevers and discomfort?

Fevers and aches can be treated with a pain reliever such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®, for example), ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®, Nuprin®), or nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS) (Aleve®). If you have kidney disease or stomach problems, check with your health care provider before taking any NSAIDS.

Is it safe to take flu medications with other over-the-counter or prescription medicines?

Many over-the-counter medications contain the same active ingredients. If you take several medicines with the same active ingredient you might be taking more than the recommended dose. This can cause serious health problems. Read all labels carefully.

If you are taking over-the-counter or prescription medications not related to the flu, talk to your health care provider or pharmacist about which cold and flu medications are safe for you.

What are antiviral medications and how can they help?

How do I treat the flu?

Antiviral medications are prescription pills, liquids, or inhalers used to prevent or treat flu viruses. They are approved for adults and children one year and older. There are four antiviral drugs approved for treating the flu in the United States—oseltamivir (Tamiflu), zanamivir (Relenza), amantadine (generic), and rimantadine (Flumadine).

FDA provides information on availability of antivirals for the 2012-2013 seasonal flu season.

On December 21, 2012, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration expanded the approved use of Tamiflu to treat children as young as 2 weeks old who have shown symptoms of flu for no longer than two days. **Tamiflu is the only product approved to treat flu infection in children younger than 1 year old.**

If you get the flu, antiviral medications can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious complications from the flu. Antiviral medications work best when started within the **first two days of getting sick.**

If you are exposed to the flu, antiviral medication can prevent you from becoming sick. Talk to your health care provider if you have been or may be near a person with the flu.

Do I need antibiotics?
Antibiotics are used to treat bacterial infections. They are not effective against viral infections like the flu. Some people have bacterial infections along with or caused by the flu and will need to take antibiotics. Severe or prolonged illness or illness that seems to get better but then gets worse may be a sign of bacterial infection. Contact your health care provider if you think you need antibiotics.

**Related Links**

- The Flu: What To Do If You Get Sick
- Get Smart: Know When Antibiotics Work
- FDA Tamiflu Information
- The best way to take your over-the-counter pain reliever?
- What You Should Know About Flu Antiviral Drugs
- Antiviral Drugs: Seasonal Flu (Podcast)
- FDA Expands Tamiflu’s Use to Treat Children Younger Than 1 Year

Center for Disease Control: [http://www.cdc.gov/flu/](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/)

Reference: