

## Get better without using antibiotics

### How should I treat my cold?

- The best way to treat most colds, coughs or sore throats is to drink plenty of fluids and to rest.
- Colds can last about two weeks and may end with a cough and bringing up phlegm.
- Over the counter remedies, like paracetamol, can ease symptoms. Ask a pharmacist for advice.
- If the cold lasts more than three weeks, or you become breathless or have chest pains, or already have a chest complaint which is getting worse, see your doctor.

### What about my children, they're always getting coughs and colds?

It's very common for children to get coughs and colds. Ask your pharmacist for advice. If the symptoms persist and you are concerned, see your doctor but don't expect antibiotics.

### Why should antibiotics not be used to treat coughs and colds?

All colds and most coughs and sore throats are caused by viruses. Antibiotics do not work against infections caused by viruses. Viral infections are more common than bacterial infections.

### How long will my illness last?

Illness	Lasts on average
Ear infection	4 days
Sore throat	1 week
Common cold	1 ½ weeks
Sinusitis	2 ½ weeks
Cough or bronchitis	3 weeks

### When should you (or your child) go back to your GP practice or contact NHS 111?

These are listed in order of urgency, with the most urgent symptoms first.

1. If you develop a severe headache and are sick.
2. If your skin is very cold or has a strange colour, or you develop an unusual rash.
3. If you feel confused or have slurred speech or are very drowsy.
4. If you have difficulty breathing. Signs that suggest breathing problems can include:
  - breathing quickly;
  - turning blue around the lips and the skin below the mouth; and
  - skin between or above the ribs getting sucked or pulled in with every breath.
5. If you develop chest pain.
6. If you have difficulty swallowing or are drooling.
7. If you cough up blood.
8. If hearing problems develop or if there is fluid coming out of your ears.

### Key facts about antibiotics

- Antibiotics are medicines used to treat infections caused by bacteria.
- Colds and most coughs are caused by viruses not bacteria, so antibiotics will not help.
- If you take antibiotics when you don't need them, they may lose their ability to kill bacteria.
- Antibiotics can upset the natural balance of bacteria in your body. This may result in diarrhoea and thrush.
- Some antibiotics can cause allergic reactions (such as rashes), nausea and reactions to sunlight.

Further information can be found at [www.nhs.uk/antibiotics](http://www.nhs.uk/antibiotics)