Common Cold

Schmitt-Thompson Clinical Content

DEFINITION

- Viral respiratory infection of the nose and throat
- *Use this protocol only if the patient has symptoms that match a common cold.*

SYMPTOMS of a common cold include:

- *Cough:* This is a common symptom. It may last 2 to 3 weeks.
- *Fever:* The fever is usually low-grade. Fever usually lasts 2 to 3 days
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Postnasal drip, throat clearing
- *Runny or stuffy (congested) nose:* These are the main symptoms. The nasal discharge may be clear, cloudy, yellow, or green. Runny nose usually lasts 7 to 10 days.
- Scratchy or sore throat
- Sneezing

TRIAGE ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Call EMS 911 Now

Severe difficulty breathing (e.g., struggling for each breath, speaks in single words)

R/O: respiratory failure, hypoxia

Very weak (can't stand)

Sounds like a life-threatening emergency to the triager

See More Appropriate Protocol

Difficulty breathing and not from stuffy nose (e.g., not relieved by cleaning out the nose)

Go to Protocol: Breathing Difficulty (Adult)

Runny nose is caused by pollen or other allergies

Go to Protocol: Nasal Allergies (Hay Fever) (Adult)

Cough is main symptom

Go to Protocol: Cough (Adult)

Sore throat is main symptom

Go to Protocol: Sore Throat (Adult)

Go to ED/UCC Now (or to Office With PCP Approval)

Patient sounds very sick or weak to the triager

Reason: Severe acute illness or serious complication suspected.

Go to Office Now

Fever > 103° F (39.4° C)

R/O: pneumonia

Fever > 101° F (38.3° C) and over 60 years of age

Fever > 100.0° F (37.8° C) and has diabetes mellitus or a weak immune system (e.g., HIV positive, cancer chemotherapy, organ transplant, splenectomy, chronic steroids)

Fever > 100.0° F (37.8° C) and bedridden (e.g., CVA, chronic illness, recovering from surgery)

R/O: Reason: higher risk of bacterial infection. Note: may need ambulance transport to ED.

See in Office Today

Fever present > 3 days (72 hours)

R/O: bacterial sinusitis, bronchitis, pneumonia

Fever returns after gone for over 24 hours and symptoms worse or not improved

R/O: bacterial sinusitis, bronchitis, pneumonia

Sinus pain (not just congestion) and fever

R/O: bacterial sinusitis

Earache

R/O: otitis media

See in Office Today or Tomorrow

Sinus congestion (pressure, fullness) present > 10 days

R/O: bacterial sinusitis, allergic rhinitis

Nasal discharge present > 10 days

R/O: bacterial sinusitis, allergic rhinitis

Using nasal washes and pain medicine > 24 hours and sinus pain (lower forehead, cheekbone, or eye) persists

R/O: sinusitis

Patient wants to be seen

Strep Test Only Visit Today or Tomorrow

Sore throat present > 5 days

R/O: Strep pharyngitis

Home Care

Colds with no complications

Vitamin and herbal supplements for colds, questions about

Neti Pot, questions about

Home Care Advice

General Care Advice for Treating a Cold

1. **Reassurance and Education - Common Cold Symptoms:**
   - It sounds like an uncomplicated cold that you can treat at home.
   - Colds are very common and may make you feel uncomfortable.
   - Colds are caused by viruses, and no medicine or "shot" will cure a a simple cold.
   - Colds are usually not serious.
   - *Here is some care advice that should help.*

2. **For a Runny Nose - Blow Your Nose:**
   - Nasal mucus and discharge help wash viruses and bacteria out of the nose and sinuses.
   - Blowing your nose helps clean out your nose. Use a handkerchief or a paper tissue.
   - If the skin around your nostrils gets irritated, apply a tiny amount of petroleum ointment to the nasal openings once or twice a day.

3. **Nasal Washes for a Stuffy Nose:**
   - *Introduction*: Saline (salt water) nasal irrigation (nasal wash) is an effective and simple home remedy for treating stuffy nose and sinus congestion. The nose can be irrigated by pouring, spraying, or squirting salt water into the nose and then letting it run back out.
   - *How it Helps:* The salt water rinses out excess mucus and washes out any irritants (dust, allergens) that might be present. It also moistens the nasal cavity.
   - *Methods*: There are several ways to irrigate the nose. You can use a saline nasal spray bottle (available over-the-counter), a rubber ear syringe, a medical syringe without the needle, or a **Neti Pot**.

4. **Nasal Washes - Step-By-Step Instructions:**
   - **Step 1:** Lean over a sink.
   - **Step 2:** Gently squirt or spray warm salt water into one of your nostrils.
   - **Step 3:** Some of the water may run into the back of your throat. Spit this out. If you swallow the salt water it will not hurt you.
   - **Step 4:** Blow your nose to clean out the water and mucus.
   - **Step 5:** Repeat steps 1 through 4 for the other nostril. You can do this a couple times a day if it seems to help you.

5. **How to Make Saline (Salt Water) Nasal Wash:**
   - Put 1 cup (8 oz; 240 ml) of water in a clean container.
   - Add 3/4 teaspoon of non-iodized salt (such as canning or pickling salt) to the water.
   - Add 1/4 teaspoon baking soda to the water. Stir well.
   - Use distilled water or boiled tap water that has cooled.
   - Throw away any unused saline nasal wash after 24 hours.

6. **Treatment for Other Cold Symptoms:**
   - *For muscle aches, headaches, or moderate fever* (more than 101° F or 38.3° C): Take acetaminophen every 4 hours.
   - *Sore throat:* Try throat lozenges, hard candy, or warm chicken broth.
   - *Cough*: Use cough drops.
   - *Hydrate*: Drink adequate liquids.

7. **Humidifier:**
   - If the air is dry, use a humidifier in the bedroom.
   - Dry air makes coughs worse.

8. **How It Is Spread:**
   - The cold virus is present in your nasal secretions.
   - The common cold is spread via airborne droplets, from sneezing and coughing.
   - It can also be spread by shaking hands with someone who has a cold.

9. **How to Protect Others From Getting Your Cold:**
   - Avoid close contact (hugging, shaking hands) with other people.
   - **Cover your nose and mouth** with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Or cough and sneeze into your upper sleeve.
   - **Wash your hands often** with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
   - Stay at home if you are sick. You can return to work or school after any fever is gone and you feel well enough to join in normal activities.

10. **Expected Course:**
    - Fever usually lasts 2 to 3 days.
    - Runny nose usually lasts 7 to 10 days.
    - Cough may last 2 to 3 weeks.

11. **Call Back If:**
    - Fever lasts over 3 days
    - Runny nose lasts over 10 days
    - You become short of breath
    - You become worse

Over-the-Counter Medicines for a Cold

1. **Medicines for Stuffy or Runny Nose:**
   - Most cold medicines that are available over-the-counter (OTC) are not helpful.
   - Antihistamines are only helpful if you also have nasal allergies.
   - If you have a very runny nose and you really think you need a medicine, you can try using a nasal decongestant for a couple days.

2. **Nasal Decongestants for a Very Stuffy Nose:**
   - **Most people do Not need to use these medicines**.
   - If your nose feels blocked, you should try using nasal washes first.
   - If you have a very stuffy nose, nasal decongestant medicines can shrink the swollen nasal mucosa and allow for easier breathing. If you have a very runny nose, these medicines can reduce the amount of drainage. They may be taken as pills by mouth or as a nasal spray.
   - *Pseudoephedrine (Sudafed)*: Available over-the-counter in pill form. Typical adult dosage is two 30 mg tablets every 6 hours.
   - *Oxymetazoline Nasal Drops (Afrin in U.S; Drixoral in Canada)*: Available over-the-counter. Clean out the nose before using. Spray each nostril once, wait one minute for absorption, and then spray a second time.
   - *Phenylephrine Nasal Drops (Neo-Synephrine)*: Available over-the-counter. Clean out the nose before using. Spray each nostril once, wait one minute for absorption, and then spray a second time.

3. **Nasal Decongestants - Extra Notes and Warnings:**
   - Do not use these medicines if you have high blood pressure, heart disease, prostate problems, or an overactive thyroid.
   - Do not use these medicines if you are pregnant.
   - Do not use these medicines if you have used a MAO inhibitor such as isocarboxazid (Marplan), phenelzine (Nardil), rasagiline (Azilect), selegiline (Eldepryl, Emsam), or tranylcypromine (Parnate) in the past 2 weeks. Life-threatening side effects can occur.
   - Do not use these medicines for more than 3 days. *Reason:* Rebound nasal congestion when you stop taking them.
   - *Before using any medicine, read all the instructions on the package.*

4. **Cough Medicines:**
   - **Cough Drops:** Over-the-counter cough drops can help a lot, especially for mild coughs. They soothe an irritated throat and remove the tickle sensation in the back of the throat. Cough drops

are easy to carry with you.

• **Cough Syrup with Dextromethorphan:** An over-the-counter cough syrup can help your cough. The most common cough suppressant in over-the-counter cough medicines is dextromethorphan.

• **Home Remedy - Hard Candy:** Hard candy works just as well as over-the-counter cough drops. People who have diabetes should use sugar-free candy.

• **Home Remedy - Honey:** This old home remedy has been shown to help decrease coughing at night. The adult dosage is 2 teaspoons (10 ml) at bedtime.

5. **Cough Syrup With Dextromethorphan:**

• Cough syrups containing the cough suppressant dextromethorphan may help decrease your cough.

• Cough syrup works best for coughs that keep you awake at night. It can also sometimes help in the late stages of a lung or airway infection when the cough is dry and hacking. Cough syrup can be used along with cough drops.

• *Examples:* Delsym 12-hour Cough, Robitussin Cough Long-Acting, Triaminic Long-Acting, Vicks DayQuil Cough.

6. **Cough Syrup With Dextromethorphan - Extra Notes and Warnings:**

• Do not try to completely stop coughs that produce mucus and phlegm.

• Coughing is helpful. It brings up the mucus from the lungs and helps prevent pneumonia.

• **Research:** Some research studies show that dextromethorphan reduces the frequency and severity of cough in those 18 years and older without significant adverse effects. Other studies suggest that dextromethorphan is no better than placebo at reducing a cough.

• **Drug Abuse:** It should be noted that dextromethorphan has become a drug of abuse. This problem is seen most often in teenagers. Overdose symptoms can range from giggling and feeling high to hallucinations and coma.

• **Warning:** Do not take dextromethorphan if you are taking a monoamine oxidase (MAO) inhibitor now or in the past 2 weeks. Examples of MAO inhibitors include isocarboxazid (Marplan), phenelzine (Nardil), selegiline (Eldepryl, Emsam, Zelapar), and tranylcypromine (Parnate).

• **Warning:** Do not take dextromethorphan if you are taking venlafaxine (Effexor).

• *Before taking any medicine, read all the instructions on the package.*

7. **Pain and Fever Medicines:**

• For pain or fever relief, take either acetaminophen or ibuprofen.

• They are over-the-counter (OTC) drugs that help treat both fever and pain. You can buy them at the drugstore.

• Treat fevers above 101° F (38.3° C). The goal of fever therapy is to bring the fever down to a comfortable level. Remember that fever medicine usually lowers fever 2 degrees F (1 - 1 1/2 degrees C).

• **Acetaminophen - Regular Strength Tylenol:** Take 650 mg (two 325 mg pills) by mouth every 4 to 6 hours as needed. Each Regular Strength Tylenol pill has 325 mg of acetaminophen. The most you should take is 10 pills a day (3,250 mg total). *Note:* In Canada, the maximum is 12 pills a day (3,900 mg total).

• **Acetaminophen - Extra Strength Tylenol:** Take 1,000 mg (two 500 mg pills) every 6 to 8 hours as needed. Each Extra Strength Tylenol pill has 500 mg of acetaminophen. The most you should take is 6 pills a day (3,000 mg total). *Note:* In Canada, the maximum is 8 pills a day (4,000 mg total).

• **Ibuprofen (e.g., Motrin, Advil):** Take 400 mg (two 200 mg pills) by mouth every 6 hours. The most you should take is 6 pills a day (1,200 mg total).

8. **Pain and Fever Medicines - Extra Notes and Warnings:**

• Follow these dosing instructions unless your doctor (or NP/PA) has told you to take a different dose.

• Acetaminophen is thought to be safer than ibuprofen or naproxen in people over 65 years old. Acetaminophen is in many OTC and prescription medicines. It might be in more than one

medicine that you are taking. You need to be careful and not take an overdose. An acetaminophen overdose can hurt the liver.

- McNeil, the company that makes Tylenol, has different maximum dosage instructions for Tylenol in Canada than in the United States. Bayer, the company that makes Aleve, has different dosage maximum instructions for Aleve in Canada and the United States.
- **Caution:** Do not take acetaminophen if you have liver disease.
- **Caution:** Do not take ibuprofen or naproxen if you have stomach problems, kidney disease, are pregnant, or have been told by your doctor to avoid this type of anti-inflammatory drug. Do not take ibuprofen or naproxen for more than 7 days without consulting your doctor. If you take blood thinners, ibuprofen and naproxen can increase the risk of bleeding.
- *Before taking any medicine, read all the instructions on the package.*

Mineral and Vitamin and Herbal Supplements

1. **Zinc Lozenges for Cold Symptoms:**
   - Studies have reported that zinc gluconate lozenges (i.e., Cold-Eeze) reduce the duration and severity of cold symptoms.
   - *Dosage:* Obtain zinc lozenges OTC. Begin taking them within 48 hours of cold onset. Use for 3 days. You should take this with food to minimize the chance of nausea.
   - *Side effects:* Some people complain of nausea and a bad taste in their mouth when they take zinc.
   - *Summary:* It may be helpful.
2. **Vitamin C for Cold Symptoms:**
   - A number of experts, including Nobel Prize winner Linus Pauling, have promoted taking high doses of this vitamin as a treatment for the common cold.
   - However, research to date shows that Vitamin C has minimal (if any) effect on the duration or degree of cold symptoms.
   - *Summary:* We do not recommend Vitamin C as a treatment for the common cold. It is probably harmless in standard doses (under 2 gms daily).
3. **Echinacea for Cold Symptoms:**
   - There is no proven benefit of using this herbal remedy in treating or preventing the common cold. In fact, current research suggests that it does not help at all.
   - *Summary:* We recommend that you do not take echinacea to treat the common cold.
4. **Read Package Instructions:**
   - *Read the package instructions thoroughly on all supplements that you take.*

Neti Pot for Sinus Symptoms

1. **Neti Pot:**
   - The Neti Pot is a small ceramic or plastic pot with a narrow spout. It looks like a small tea pot. Two manufacturers of the Neti Pot are the Himalayan Institute in Pennsylvania and SinuCleanse in Wisconsin.
   - *How it Helps*: The Neti Pot performs nasal washing (also called nasal irrigation or "jala neti"). The salt water rinses out excess mucus, washes out any irritants (dust, allergens) that might be present, and moisturizes the nasal cavity.
   - *Indications*: The Neti Pot is widely used as a home remedy to relieve conditions such as colds, sinus infections, and hay fever (nasal allergies).
   - *Adverse reactions*: None. Though, not everyone likes the sensation of pouring water into their nose.
   - *YouTube Instructional Video*: There are instructional videos on how to use a Neti Pot both on manufacturers websites and also on YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8sDIbRAXlg).
2. **Neti Pot Step-By-Step Instructions:**
   - **Step 1.)** Follow the directions on the salt package to make warm salt water.

- **Step 2.)** Lean forward and turn your head to one side over the sink. Keep your forehead slightly higher than your chin.
- **Step 3.)** Gently insert the spout of the neti pot into the higher nostril. Put it far enough so that it forms a comfortable seal.
- **Step 4.)** Raise the Neti Pot gradually so the salt water flows in through your higher nostril and out of the lower nostril. Breathe through your mouth.
- **Step 5.)** When the Neti Pot is empty, blow your nose to clean out the water and mucus.
- **Step 6.)** Some of the water may run into the back of your throat. Spit this out. If you swallow the salt water it will not hurt you.
- **Step 7.)** Refill the Neti Pot and repeat on the other side. Again, exhale vigorously to clear the nasal passages.

3. **How to Make Saline (Salt Water) Nasal Wash:**
   - Put 1 cup (8 oz; 240 ml) of water in a clean container.
   - Add 3/4 teaspoon of non-iodized salt (such as canning or pickling salt) to the water.
   - Add 1/4 teaspoon baking soda to the water. Stir well.
   - Use distilled water or boiled tap water that has cooled.
   - Throw away any unused saline nasal wash after 24 hours.

FIRST AID

N/A

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Key Points

- Colds are very common. The average adult has 3 to 4 colds each year.
- Colds are caused by viruses. No medicine or "shot" will cure an uncomplicated cold.
- Colds are usually not serious. Most people with colds do not need to be seen.
- Rarely colds can lead to illnesses of greater seriousness like: sinusitis, bronchitis, pneumonia, and otitis media. Older adults and immunocompromised are at higher risk of developing these infectious complications.

Symptoms

The symptoms of a common cold usually **peak** in 2 to 3 days and **last on average** 3 to 10 days. The cough may last longer.

Some **common** symptoms of a cold are:

- *Cough:* This is a common symptom. It may last 2 to 3 weeks.
- *Fever:* The fever is usually low-grade. Fever usually lasts 2 to 3 days
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Postnasal drip, throat clearing
- *Runny or stuffy (congested) nose:* These are the main symptoms. The nasal discharge may be clear, cloudy, yellow, or green. Runny nose usually lasts 7 to 10 days.
- Scratchy or sore throat
- Sneezing

Some **less common** symptoms are:

- Hoarseness
- Swollen lymph nodes in the neck
- Tearing eyes

Causes

Colds are caused by viruses.

- Influenza virus (5 to 15%)
- Parainfluenza virus
- Rhinovirus (30 to 50%)
- Respiratory syncitial virus (RSV)

How It Is Spread (Transmission)

Viruses that cause the common cold are spread via airborne droplets, from sneezing and coughing.

Complications

Rarely colds can lead to illnesses of greater seriousness such as:

- Bronchitis
- Otitis media
- Pneumonia
- Sinusitis

Older adults and people with weak immune systems are at higher risk of developing these infectious complications.

Diagnosis

A doctor (or NP/PA) may perform a medical history (ask questions) and physical examination.

A cold can usually be diagnosed by taking a history (talking to the patient) and performing an exam. Sometimes the doctor may perform a COVID or influenza (flu) test to make certain that the symptoms are not from COVID-19 or influenza. This test is done by swabbing the inside of the nose or the back of the throat.

Often people diagnose themselves with a cold based on the symptoms.

Treatment

There is no **prescription medicine** or "shot" that will cure an uncomplicated cold.

People can treat the symptoms at home using **over-the-counter medicines** for cough, fever, pain, and runny or stuffy nose.

Prevention

Avoid close contact (hugging, shaking hands) with people that have a cold.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

Physical activity lowers the risk for acute respiratory infections.

Color of Nasal Discharge

The nasal discharge normally changes color during different stages of a cold.

- It starts as a clear discharge and later becomes cloudy.
- Sometimes it becomes yellow or green colored for a few days; and this is still normal.
- Intermittent yellow or green discharge is more common with antihistamine use, low humidity, or sleep. *Reason:* All of these events reduce the production of normal nasal secretions.
- Nasal mucus can become blood-tinged during a cold. This is from blowing the nose forcefully, frequent wiping of the nose, or nosepicking.

Yellow or green nasal secretions suggest the presence of a bacterial sinusitis ONLY if they occur in combination with [1] sinus pain OR [2] the return of a fever after it has been gone for over 24 hours OR [3] nasal discharge persists > 10 days without improvement.

Nasal secretions only become a problem when they block the nose and interfere with breathing through the nose. During a cold, if nasal breathing is noisy but the caller can't see blockage in the nose, it usually means the dried mucus is farther back. Nasal washes can remove it.

Nasal Washes (Nasal Irrigation) for Sinus Symptoms

Saline (salt water) nasal irrigation is an effective and simple home remedy for treating cold symptoms and other conditions involving the nasal and sinus passages. Nasal irrigation consists of pouring, spraying, or squirting salt water into the nose and then letting it run back out.

- *How it Helps:* The salt water rinses out excess mucus, washes out any irritants (dust, allergens) that might be present, and moisturizes the nasal cavity.
- *Indications:* Nasal irrigation appears to be an effective treatment for chronic sinusitis. It may also help reduce sinus symptoms from acute viral upper respiratory infection (colds), irritant rhinitis (e.g., dust from the workplace), and allergic rhinitis (hay fever). Some doctors recommend it for rhinitis of pregnancy.
- *Adverse reactions:* Nasal irrigation is safe and there are no serious adverse effects. However, not everyone likes the sensation of having water in their nose.
- *Methods:* There are several ways to perform nasal irrigation. None has been proven to be better than any other. Methods include use of a nasal spray bottle, a rubber ear syringe, a Water Pik set on "low", a 5 - 20 cc medical syringe without the needle, or a **Neti Pot**.

Here is how to make salt water nasal wash at home:

- Put 1 cup (8 oz; 240 ml) of water in a clean container.
- Add 3/4 teaspoon of non-iodized salt (such as canning or pickling salt) to the water.
- Add 1/4 teaspoon baking soda to the water. Stir well.
- Use distilled water or boiled tap water that has cooled.
- Throw away any unused saline nasal wash after 24 hours.

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- *How it Helps:* The Neti Pot performs nasal washing (also called nasal irrigation or "jala neti"). The salt water rinses out excess mucus, washes out any irritants (dust, allergens) that might be present, and moisturizes the nasal cavity.
- *Indications:* The Neti Pot is widely used as a home remedy to relieve conditions such as colds, sinus infections, and hay fever (nasal allergies).
- *Adverse reactions:* None. Nasal irrigation with a Neti Pot is safe and there are no serious adverse effects. However, not everyone likes the sensation of having salt water poured into their nose.
- *YouTube Instructional Video:* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8sDIbRAXlg

Neti Pot and Primary Amebic Meningoencephalitis (PAM)

Primary amebic meningoencephalitis (PAM) is caused by *Naegleria fowleri*, the so-called "brain-eating ameba". This is an extremely rare infection. There were 65 cases in the United States between 2001 and 2020.

- The majority of the cases of PAM have occurred in the southern United States and were linked to swimming or bathing in freshwater lakes, rivers, and ponds containing this ameba. The ameba can also be found in hot springs, geothermal water sources, and poorly maintained swimming pools.
- In 2011 there were two case of PAM in the state of Louisiana that occurred after nasal irrigation with a Neti Pot. These two cases suggest -- but is not definite proof -- that the nasal irrigation fluid that the individuals used was somehow contaminated with the *Naegleria fowleri* ameba.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that individuals should use distilled, sterile or previously boiled water for nasal irrigation. It's also important to rinse the irrigation device after each use and leave open to air dry.

Mineral, Vitamin and Herbal Supplements for Colds

Over-the-count supplements provide little to no benefit in treating the common cold.

- *Zinc:* Some studies have reported that zinc gluconate lozenges (i.e., Cold-Eeze) may reduce the duration and severity of cold symptoms [See Mossad and Prasad references]. Some people complain of nausea and a bad taste in their mouth when they take zinc. A zinc nasal gel (i.e., Zicam) is also available over-the-counter. There have been a number of lawsuits claiming that Zicam causes loss of smell (anosmia); it is uncertain whether this truly happens, but for now it is reasonable for the call center nurse to not recommend this product.
- *Vitamin C:* A number of experts, including Nobel Prize winner Linus Pauling, have promoted taking high doses of this vitamin as a treatment for the common cold. Research to date shows that Vitamin C has minimal (if any) effect on the duration or degree of cold symptoms. Thus, it cannot be recommended as a treatment. Vitamin C is probably harmless in standard doses (< 2 gms daily).
- *Echinacea:* There is no proven benefit of using this herbal remedy in treating or preventing the common cold. In fact, current research suggests that it does not help.

Dextromethorphan Cough Medicines for Cough

The most common cough suppressant in OTC cough medications is dextromethorphan. Usually the letters "DM" appear in the name. An example is Robitussin DM.

- *Research:* Dextromethorphan in some research studies has been shown to reduce the frequency and severity of cough in adults (18 years or older) without significant adverse effects. However, other studies suggest that dextromethorphan is no better than placebo at reducing a cough.
- *Dextromethorphan and Adult Telephone Triage Protocols:* The care advice in these protocols continues to recommend DM containing cough syrups. The rationale for this is: DM may reduce cough to some extent in adults, adult patients may benefit from the placebo effect of DM, many patients demand a recommendation for a cough syrup, there is no OTC medicine that works better than DM, and generally DM has no side effects.
- *Use Cough Drop or Hard Candy Instead:* Cough drops can often be used instead of cough syrups. While some would consider them a placebo similar to cough medicines, they may actually reduce coughing by soothing an irritated throat. In addition they have the advantage of portability. Hard candy probably works just as well as an OTC cough drop.
- *Use Honey for Nocturnal Cough:* See information below.
- *Dextromethorphan - A Drug of Abuse:* It is important to note that DM has become a drug of abuse. This problem is seen most commonly in the adolescent population. Overdose symptoms can range from giggling and euphoria to hallucinations or coma.

Honey for Cough

A research study [Paul reference] compared honey to either dextromethorphan (DM) or no treatment

for the treatment of nocturnal coughing. The study group contained 105 children age 2 to 18 years. Honey consistently scored the best for reducing cough frequency and cough severity. It also scored best for improving sleep. Dextromethorphan (DM) did not score significantly better than "no treatment" (showing its lack of efficacy).

- *How Might Honey Work?* One explanation for how honey works is that sweet substances naturally cause reflex salivation and increased airway secretions. These secretions may lubricate the airway and remove the trigger (or tickle) that causes a dry, nonproductive cough.
- *Adult Dosage:* 2 teaspoons (10 ml) at bedtime.
- *Warning:* Do not give to children under 1 year of age. *Reason:* There is an increased risk of botulism.

Triager Tips

Colds are usually not serious. Most people with colds do not need to be seen by a doctor (or NP/PA).

People will often report having a stuffy nose with **difficulty breathing through their nose**. Difficulty breathing that is not from a stuffy nose (e.g., not relieved by cleaning out the nose) is not normal in a cold. A common cold is an acute upper respiratory infection (URI) and there are no lower respiratory tract infection symptoms, such as breathing difficulty or wheezing.

Some other concerning symptoms are:

- Severe difficulty breathing (e.g., struggling for each breath, speaks in single words). *Triager response:* EMS 911.
- Fever lasting longer than 3 days. *Triager response:* See PCP Within 24 Hours.
- Nasal discharge or sinus congestion lasting longer than 10 days. *Triager response:* See PCP Within 3 Days.

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