

# Common Cold Myths

With the sniffle season fast approaching, it's time to arm yourself with the latest in cold know-how by dispelling these myths.

**MYTH:** Cold and flu viruses can't survive for long outside the body.

While cold and flu viruses can only survive on human hands for several hours, they can live for up to 48 hours on non-porous surfaces such as telephones, computer keyboards, doorknobs, kitchen utensils, or toys. That is why personal hygiene and cleanliness are so vital in preventing their spread.

When someone is infected with a cold or flu, they can spread the virus in two ways: through coughing and sneezing virus particles into the air, and through touching surfaces after coughing or sneezing into their hands.

If you breathe in these particles, or touch a surface on which they have landed and then touch your face, the virus can enter your mouth, eyes, or nose and infect you.

By washing your hands frequently and not touching your face, you can reduce the incidence of respiratory diseases by 40 per cent, according to a UK virus specialist. Furthermore, you can help prevent the spread of infection by regularly wiping down hard surfaces in your workplace and home with an antibacterial solution such as diluted tea-tree oil.

**MYTH:** Green or yellow mucus indicates you need antibiotics.

Coloured nasal discharge is a common sign of a cold, and is not necessarily the result of a bacterial infection. Antibiotics are ineffective against the cold virus, but may help bacterial sinus, chest, or ear infections which can develop following a cold.

**MYTH:** Cold symptoms are best left untreated because they help your body expel the virus.

Because cold symptoms are your body's way of trying to rid itself of the virus, some people believe it's best to let a cold run its course without treatment.

Approximately 25 per cent of people who get a cold virus infection do not develop symptoms, and yet these people get over the infection as well as those who do have symptoms.

Sneezing and nasal secretions, while useful in removing dust and pollen from the nose, cannot eliminate the cold virus because the virus is multiplying inside the nasal cells where it is safe. In fact, blowing your nose can force nasal secretions into the sinus cavity, which may lead to bacterial infection. Not forgetting, of course, that coughing, sneezing, and nose blowing can aid the spread of the virus to others.

There are many natural and over-the-counter (OTC) treatments for cold symptoms. OTC medicines are generally effective and safe, although may have side effects and/or interact with other medications, so it's always important to discuss this with your pharmacist.

Other treatments to consider include vitamin C supplements, zinc lozenges, echinacea, and garlic.

For sore throats, hot drinks containing bitter flavours are particularly beneficial, while liquorice tea can help treat a lingering cough (but it can raise blood pressure, so avoid it if you have hypertension or diabetes).

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