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IPC
INDEPENDENT PHARMACEUTICAL CONSULTANTS, INC.

HealthWise





Watch Out! It's Cold Season

Winter comes, and you feel yourself start to sniffle and cough. Suddenly you are sneezing, exhausted and have a sore throat. Sound familiar? You have a cold!

The cold is the most common illness in the United States. While the typical cold lasts only 5-10 days, it results in more sick days and doctor visits than any other illness. There is no cure for the common cold, but the right tools and education can help decrease the duration and severity of cold symptoms.

What causes a cold?

Despite popular belief, cold weather and wetness do not cause colds. In fact, the cold can result from 200 different viruses. The major cold-causing culprit is the rhinovirus (Ri-NO-vi-rus), a common upper respiratory virus. The rhinovirus infiltrates the protective lining inside the nose and the sinuses, and a cold develops. While the rhinovirus is the most common virus, it is not the only source of colds. As a result, people tend to develop more than one cold in a year.

Treating Your Pesky Cold

A cure for the cold does not exist. You can, however, treat the symptoms. Rest, fluids, and time are step-one to recovery. Eight glasses of water and eight hours of sleep per day will help the body recover faster. Over-the-counter medication is the second step. Navigating the aisles of cold and flu medications can be daunting. Boxes of medications become complicated because cold and flu products typically contain multiple active ingredients. To make the drug selection process easier, remember the following pointers.

Headache, sore throat, and fever: For headaches, body aches, and fevers above 99.9 degrees, look for products that state "pain/fever reducer" such as Tylenol (acetaminophen), Motrin or Advil (ibuprofen), and Aleve (naproxen). Many cold and flu products contain at least one "pain/fever reducer", so check the back of the box to make sure you are not taking more medication than necessary.

Stuffy nose: Pseudoephedrine (Sudafed) is a decongestant. It will unclog a stuffy, pressure-filled head. You must purchase pseudoephedrine behind the pharmacy counter and will need to present a driver's license. Sudafed may not be appropriate for people with high blood pressure or other heart-related concerns.

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IMPORTANT! Treating Colds in Children

If under the age of four, DO NOT use over-the-counter cough and cold products.

Children under the age of four should not take any over-the-counter cough and cold products unless prescribed by their physician. Life-threatening side effects can occur. Many cough and cold manufacturers have voluntarily pulled their products off of drugstore shelves.

Do not use aspirin.

Instead of aspirin, use acetaminophen (Tylenol) or Motrin (ibuprofen) in children under 12 and during viral illnesses in teenagers under 18. Aspirin can cause an extremely rare, but potentially fatal condition called Reye's Syndrome.

Treating Your Cold, *continued*

Stuffy nose, *continued:* Decongestant nasal sprays can also help relieve a stuffy nose. Just be sure not to use for longer than three to five days. Saline nasal sprays can clear the nasal passage and may be a better alternative for people who cannot use pseudoephedrine.

Runny nose, watery eyes, or sneezing: Antihistamines have debatable use during a cold. First-generation antihistamines, such as diphenhydramine (Benadryl) and chlorpheniramine are more useful, but they carry more side effects, such as drowsiness. Second generation antihistamines, such as loratadine (Claritin), cetirizine (Zyrtec), and fexofenadine (Allegra) may also help to reduce symptoms and do not make patients as sleepy.

Cough: Two types of cough exist: a wet (or productive) cough and a dry cough. People with colds often have a wet cough. When mucus builds up in the lungs and the upper respiratory tract, a wet cough ensues. Do not try to stop a wet cough. The body is clearing mucus away from the lungs, which is part of the body's defense system. Conversely, a dry cough is a hacking, uncomfortable, unproductive cough that can be treated with a cough suppressant. If a dry cough becomes bothersome, a cough suppressant may be necessary. Products that state "DM" on the front of the box contain a drug called dextromethorphan. Cough suppressants reduce the body's cough reflex.

Mucus in the chest: Expectorants will not stop a cough. Instead, they thin the mucus to make it easier to cough out of the body. Guaifenesin (Mucinex) is an expectorant ideal for people with a wet cough.

Deciphering the "Back of the Box"

Cold and flu products contain multiple active ingredients, so it is important to know what your selection contains. Drug names can become confusing. Instead, concentrate on what the drugs do. Knowing what an antihistamine or a decongestant is can help you select the right product. For example, you may already take Claritin, an antihistamine, for allergies, but the cold product you select may also contain an antihistamine. You would unnecessarily be taking two antihistamines, which could make you experience more severe side effects.

What the Back of the Box Says

Drug Facts

Active ingredient	***Purpose***
Acetaminophen	Pain reliever/fever reducer
Chlorpheniramine	Antihistamine
Dextromethorphan	Cough Suppressant
Phenylephrine	Nasal decongestant
Guaifenesin	Expectorant

What the Back of the Box Means

Drug Facts

Purpose	***This means it . . .***
Pain reliever/fever reducer	relieves fever, headache, and body aches
Antihistamine	relieves sneezing, runny nose, or watery eyes
Cough Suppressant	helps to stop a cough
Nasal decongestant	relieves stuffy nose and pressure in head or in ears
Expectorant	breaks up mucus in the chest

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