

OTC Symptom checker

is it a cold or flu?

**PULL OUT
AND KEEP**

or download
as a PDF at
www.otcmag.com

How can I spot a cold?

- Symptoms develop gradually over one or two days
- The patient recovers four to 10 days later – the usual length of duration is 10 days
- Infants may be irritable, have difficulty feeding and have diarrhoea
- The symptoms are uncomfortable, but not disabling – the customer can still perform day-to-day activities

What should I recommend?

- Do not use antibiotics as colds tend to be viral infections
- Drink plenty of fluids, rest as much as possible and eat healthily
- Use preparations to tackle symptoms, including cough mixtures, decongestants, and pain killers. Do not recommend paracetamol if the patient is already taking a product that contains it (always check the packaging)

Cold

Mild fever in children, but fever is rare in adults. Some patients have a headache

Initial discomfort in the eyes, nose and throat, and possibly sinuses (around the top of the nose) and ears. Sneezing and a runny nose follow, with nasal congestion. Mucus generally starts clear, becoming greener and thicker

A sore throat and a cough may be present. There can be loss of taste and smell, and hoarseness

Some people may feel mild muscle aches

Flu

Fever starts suddenly and is always present. The patient may be sweating and/or experience chills and shivers. Symptoms can also include headache, vertigo and nausea

There may be sneezing and a runny nose, but this is generally less frequent and severe than in a cold

The patient may have a sore throat or cough. Vomiting and loss of appetite is common

Muscle aches and pains are common, including back pain. The patient is often so fatigued they cannot get out of bed

Cold and flu are often used interchangeably, but are radically different conditions. Use this wallchart to spot the difference

Refer to the pharmacist anyone with symptoms of cold or flu who:

- is pregnant
- is 65 years or over and has flu symptoms
- has a long-term condition such as asthma or diabetes
- is a child who has stopped drinking and is unusually lethargic
- is a very young baby
- has symptoms that have become worse or are prolonged
- has had a cough for more than two weeks
- is coughing up thick, coloured or blood-stained mucus
- has flu and has had a high temperature for more than 48 hours
- is short of breath or has severe chest pain when they breathe or cough
- has a sore throat or hoarseness that is not improving after a week
- has a rash, stiff neck or difficulty swallowing
- has earache

How can I spot flu?

- Symptoms appear rapidly with a fever of 38-40°C
- Severe symptoms last four to five days, and recovery is usually complete in seven to 10 days
- Fatigue and depression may last for several weeks
- Older people may not develop a fever, and babies and infants can be drowsy, feed poorly and have ear infections

What should I recommend?

- At-risk groups (the elderly, pregnant women and people with long-term conditions) should receive a flu vaccination every autumn
- Drugs are available within the first 48 hours of symptoms, but they only reduce the duration and severity of flu
- Stay warm, drink plenty of fluids and rest as much as possible
- Use ibuprofen and/or paracetamol to relieve pain