



Common cold - What causes it?

Sore throat, cough, catarrh, hoarseness and - mainly in children - even earache, are the typical symptoms of a common cold. In addition to this, general symptoms such as headache and body ache are experienced frequently, rarely by an increase in temperature or fever. Besides this, patients suffering from common cold often feel tired and exhausted. How a flu affects each person individually and how pronounced the symptoms are, depends upon the type of virus causing it, the resistance power of the individual at the time of the infection and the areas of the respiratory tract that are primarily affected.

What are the symptoms of common cold?

Illnesses such as common cold primarily need one thing to get better: Patience. The symptoms usually last for a week; and it is not uncommon for them to last for even 14 days. Dry cough can last up to three weeks. The above graph shows the course that is more or less typical of a flu. It can vary from cold to cold as to which symptoms occur and when they subside again. The common cold lasts for nine days on an average.

How does a common cold develop?

In most cases, acute respiratory tract infections are caused by viruses. Around 200 different types of viruses can trigger a cold. The viruses are contagious. Infection usually spreads via airborne droplets, that is, through the inhalation of tiny respiratory droplets containing the virus, which the infected person spreads while coughing and sneezing. The second important transmission route is the hands. The virus spreads in the mucous membranes of the respiratory tracts and cause an inflammatory reaction, which then triggers common cold symptoms. If several people come together in closed rooms, then the risk of infection increases.

How is a common cold treated?

In general, the immune system copes up so well with the common cold that the illness gets cured on its own. Hence in most of the cases, medicinal treatment is not required and even fever need not usually be treated immediately. Avoiding physical exertion, reducing stress, getting adequate sleep, drinking lots of fluids, avoiding smoking helps the immune system in fighting against the viral infection. If the patient suffers from a strong feeling of illness, fever or pain, then antipyretic painkillers can reduce these symptoms. Many patients feel better after steam inhalation. Leg compresses are established home remedies for fever; so are throat and ear compresses for throat ache and earache. Antibiotics do not have any effect on the viruses, which trigger most of the acute respiratory tract infections. Hence these medicines that are sometimes life-saving for bacterial infections, are useless for general common cold. Only when rare complications such as e.g. bacterial lung infection occur, antibiotics must be taken.