Not so much fun in the summer! Surviving a summer cold

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Introduction

Although the common cold is usually more common during the winter season, many people suffer from a cold during the summer season. The common cold is usually a minor illness. However, the symptoms can be bothersome, especially in warmer weather. Although there are many viruses that cause a cold, a virus called rhinovirus is often the most common cause, accounting for up to 40% of colds during spring and summer. This cold-causing virus is contagious and easily spread by sneezing, coughing or through hand-to-hand contact with someone who has a cold.

Symptoms

A cold usually starts with a sore throat, followed by a runny nose, with a clear, watery discharge and sometimes a cough. Patients may also present with nasal congestion, sneezing and itchy, watery eyes but these may more likely be symptoms of allergic rhinitis or hayfever, rather than a cold. Colds are often confused with influenza (flu), and the terms are often incorrectly used interchangeably. However, it must be noted that symptoms of flu are generally worse, and unlike a cold, have a sudden onset with fever, chills and sore muscles and joints.

Spread the word, not the cold

The best way to prevent having a cold is to avoid “catching” it in the first place. The following precautions will help reduce the risk of contracting a cold:

- Hands should be washed often with soap and water. An alcohol-based hand sanitiser should be kept on hand in the event that soap and water are not available. Hand-washing is especially important if symptoms such as coughing, sneezing and runny nose are present.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands. Viruses that cause colds can enter the body this way and cause illness.
- Reduce contact with people who are sick.
- Cough and sneeze into a tissue and then throw it away, or cough and sneeze into the upper shirt sleeve, completely covering the mouth and nose.
- Disinfect the surrounding environment and frequently touched surfaces.

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Treating a summer cold

There are various over-the-counter (OTC) treatment options that can offer symptomatic relief of a cold.

One of the main symptoms of a cold is nasal congestion or a blocked nose. This happens when the mucous membranes lining the nasal passages swell. A decongestant works by constricting the mucosal blood vessels within the nasal passages, relieving the feeling of congestion. Decongestants may be applied locally (as drops or sprays) or taken orally and should be limited to short-term use only:

- Locally-acting nasal decongestants (oxymetazoline, xylometazoline) should be used up to a maximum of five days to avoid rebound nasal congestion.
- Oral decongestants (pseudoephedrine, phenylephrine,
phenylpropanolamine) are available in combination with antihistamines or analgesics and are available as tablets or syrups.

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs such as ibuprofen or paracetamol may be used to relieve the discomfort of aches, pains and sore throat associated with a cold.

Steam inhalation may also be used to relieve nasal congestion and to soothe the nasal passages. In addition, saline sprays or saline nasal rinses may soothe the nasal passages. Gargling with warm salt water often provides relief from a sore throat.

The use of antibiotics should be considered when the cold is complicated by a bacterial infection such as sinusitis or otitis media. These patients should be referred to their doctor for evaluation and treatment.

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**Conclusion**

Colds are the most common condition for which patients visit the pharmacy. Symptoms of a cold during summer are often bothersome and inconvenient. Since there is no cure for a cold, relief of symptoms with OTC medicines, is the best intervention. A doctor should be consulted should the cold not resolve after ten days.

**Bibliography**