

## Prevention & Cures for Colds

h2g2 The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy: Earth Edition  
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The autumn and winter months are a time for wrapping up warm, lounging in front of a roaring fire, eating roast chestnuts and sipping hot toddies. However, this rather stylised and manicured vision ignores some rather unpleasant aspects of the colder months: snotty noses, sore throats and chesty coughs that sound like a jack hammer breaking concrete - all rather unpleasant but endemic in the winter.



Short of moving to the North Pole where germs cannot survive, what else can we do to prevent the sniffles? How important is diet? Should we wrap up? If so, what parts of our bodies should we wrap? How can we avoid colds in planes and air-conditioned offices? Is the flu vaccine the best option? And when we have a cold, how can we get rid of it quickly? What follows is an h2g2 guide to prevention and cures for colds.

### Chilli & Garlic

It doesn't matter what you put it in, as long as there's loads of it! Garlic is great for combating disease (it's reputed to have antiseptic qualities) and chilli helps clear out the sinuses. In fact, hot and spicy food is the preferred cold remedy for many people. Hot lime pickle, anyone?

What I use a lot of is Hot Lime Pickle (ask for the Patak's brand and start with the mild and work your way up to the hot). I prepare a delicious meal for two in under 5 mins. Take two cans of chick peas and drain them. Mix with four heaped tablespoons of lime pickle and heat in a microwave for about 3-4 minutes. When piping hot, serve with cheese.

If you're near good Tex-Mex food (and if you're more than five hundred miles from Mexico, you're not), chips and hot salsa are a real treat when you've got a cold. In fact, just eating a few jalapenos will do the job. For the true masochists, you have to try the Scotch Bonnet pepper (*habanero*). It resembles a capsicum pepper in shape, but it's about the size of a cherry. One Researcher watched somebody eat one of these; apparently they turned purple, then white and then red.

### Chinese Horseradish Mustard

Have you ever considered Chinese horseradish mustard and several egg rolls? If you're in the right restaurant, a quarter inch of egg roll dipped in mustard should take the top of your head clean off. There's something very penetrating about horseradish fumes - if it burns too much, open your mouth surreptitiously and let some of the fumes escape. For best results, try to keep your mouth closed. You'll sweat a bit, but that's to be expected. You'll enjoy it, especially if you're a masochist.

### **Don't Kiss People with Colds...**

... even if they are very cute! It is best advised that in order to avoid catching a cold, we must not kiss or share drinks with people who have colds, even if they are very kissable and their drink is quite delicious (unless, of course, they're just so cute it's actually worth getting a cold from them).

### **The Hot Toddy**

While most recipes for the hot toddy use whisky, water, sugar, lemon and cloves, here's an entirely different one:

- Boil one cup of milk.
- Add sugar to taste.
- Top up with as much whisky as you see fit and drink.

The combination of hot milk and whisky induces a sort of soporific stupor that will eventually lead to a good night's sleep - which is exactly what a cold demands (all those old wives are right). A posher alternative is to make yourself a steaming cup of hot chocolate (cocoa doesn't seem to work as well) and bung in a measure of brandy.

### **Some Obvious Tips**

Here's a short h2g2 cold prevention action list:

- Take loads of Vitamin C.
- Eat lots of fruit - it has a high vitamin C content.
- Get plenty of sleep. Go to bed early and don't let that nasty bug infiltrate your immune system. This is war!
- If you can, take it easy as soon as symptoms develop... blag some time off work or education. This way, you might fight it off before it gets bad.
- This sounds obvious, but avoid close contact with people who have a cold or other infectious illnesses.

And here's a mini h2g2 cold and flu fact list:

- There is a correlation between sunspot activity and flu epidemics.
- The worst epidemic ever was in 1918 to 1919. It was known as the Spanish flu and was spread by the return of soldiers from World War I causing 200,000 deaths in Britain and five million deaths in India. Eskimos were hit very badly too, with many communities losing over half their population.
- Aspirin reduces the symptoms but doesn't help cure the disease. Just a clarification regarding antibiotics and colds: antibiotics are indicated for bacterial infections. A cold is caused by viral infections. Antibiotics are completely useless for a cold.
- 'Flu vaccine contains components of two types of Influenza A and one type of Influenza B viruses. Because the flu virus is continually changing, and different types circulate each winter, a new flu vaccine has to be produced each year!'

- Many animals can catch flu too. The strain that affects chickens ('Fowl Plague') is almost always fatal.
- Finally, wine or grape juice can kill a variety of viruses. So there's an excellent excuse when you next have a cold!

Contrary to popular opinion, going out in the cold doesn't cause you to catch a cold. Being cold does make you more susceptible to catching viruses because your body is working less efficiently, but colds are only caught more in the winter because of peoples' closer proximity to each other and because of recycled air due to shut windows and poor ventilation.

The steam thing works well and should be considered. Cold viruses mostly live and breed in your nose, and can be killed off at temperatures higher than body temperature. So inhaling steam from a boiling kettle or saucepan of water regularly helps enormously. Also recommended is steam inhalation for clearing the nose, especially if you put a tiny little amount of menthol crystals in the water. It'll blow your head off, but it takes all the snot with it. Olbas Oil (a mixture of several different essential oils and menthol) is also great for this, and it's also good to put a couple of drops on a tissue by your bed. It's great for keeping your head clear during the night. Smells nice, too. And it works well if you put it in the bath.

### **One Not So Obvious Tip**

If you think you're getting a cold or your head is bunged up, mustard baths work very well. It brings your blood to the surface so you get a nice glow and clears out your nose. Also makes your eyes water a bit too. It's a very Victorian idea but does actually have a beneficial effect. Stores like Culpeper sell packets of it.

### **Wash Yer Hands!**

... you dirty git.

Colds are only caught from other people; they don't spontaneously appear. So, if somebody has a cold, try to avoid contact. Don't shake hands with them - people touch their nose and face frequently. Wash your hands often too. It doesn't sound like much but you would not believe how much it actually helps. With all the people out there sneezing and coughing all over things it only seems logical. Not to mention most people don't even wash their hands after using the bathroom! And if you think you are safe because you wash after you go, what about the person before you, did they wash? And if they didn't, well, they just grabbed the handle on the door to get out. Now you are going to have to touch it too!

### **Suck on Zinc**

One Researcher thinks that zinc's the thing to keep you in the pink:

*The best treatment that I have found for a cold is to use zinc lozenges. If I start using zinc at the first sign of a cold, it tends to be a mild one, and only lasts three to four days,*

*instead of five to seven days. Of course, increasing my daily intake of vitamin C also helps. Zinc works by preventing the virus from getting a strong foothold on the tissues of the nose and throat. Therefore, you need to follow the directions and use the lozenges regularly for the duration. After a day of using them, you will notice a chalky taste in your mouth, and your sense of taste will be impaired, but if you had a full blown bad cold, you wouldn't be able to taste anything anyway.*

### **A Note For The Singers**

If you're a singer/public speaker, buy some Vocalzones. They taste disgusting but do the job really well. They're available at most chemists in the UK, including Boots. Another tip if you're a singer or teacher or otherwise depend on your voice more than most: if you get a sore throat, don't ever take any of the throat sprays or lozenges with anaesthetic in them. An alarming number of sore throat treatments have mild anaesthetics nowadays. It may make your throat hurt a lot less, but sadly your throat is hurting for a reason - to tell you not to try and speak. If you numb your throat, and then carry on talking or singing, you will do it a lot of damage. It is not unheard of for people to do irreparable damage like this - nothing as bad as permanently losing or changing your normal speaking voice, but easily enough to damage your range and tone if you're an opera singer, or to reduce your vocal power and sustainability for speaking in large rooms without amplification. If you do unwittingly take such a medicine, then the best thing to do is to shut up and pretend you've lost your voice.

### **Avoiding Sore Noses**

This may sound obvious, but the soreness of noses is caused by the combination of damp mucus and almost constant rubbing of the nose while blowing it. So, to avoid a sore conk, there are two things you can do:

- Use tissues impregnated with a soothing balm lotion.
- Blow your nose less often. It helps if you use an inhaler stick, or a menthol steam bath. Both clear the nose nicely - have a good blow straight away to clear away the 'debris', and hopefully you'll have a longer time between blows.

### **Sore Throats**

One of the best remedies for a sore throat is a honey, lemon and glycerine drink.

- Into a mug put one to two tablespoons of glycerine (available from chemists), the juice of half a lemon (concentrated stuff works, but fresh tastes better) and two teaspoons of honey (although this can be adjusted to suit your tastes).
- Top up with boiling water, stirring vigorously to dissolve the sticky ingredients.
- Drink while it's still hot. Your throat will soon be feeling a lot better.

### **Exercise**

Getting regular exercise can help ward off most colds. Exercise just keeps you in better shape, so that having a minor virus won't put you out of work. It's also worth pointing out that a little gentle exercise can be helpful even while you're sick (assuming you have

the strength). Exercise raises your body temperature which, like a fever, helps to destroy the microbes that have invaded your body. Also, the act of sweating and then drinking a lot of water to replenish the body's fluids is a cleansing process that can help to eliminate toxins left in your body by the microscopic invaders.

### **Ginger Tea**

Here is a recipe for an excellent tea that is soothing for sore throats and helps boost the body's defences:

- Grate 1/2 inch to 1 inch of fresh ginger root into 2 cups of boiling water.
- Let the mixture soak for about two minutes.
- Strain the bits of ginger from the liquid and throw them away. Add the juice of 1/4 of a lemon and a spoonful of honey.

One warning; this is not the pleasant sort of tea you might be used to drinking. However, there is nothing like it for recovering a voice lost to a bad cold.

### **Family Concoctions**

My auntie says that a hot lemon drink with a drop of whisky, a teaspoon of honey and a pinch of cinnamon mixed in does wonders. It clears up nasal blockages and gives your body a vitamin boost.

My grandmother every morning adds apple cider vinegar, blackstrap molasses, cayenne pepper, and brewers' yeast to spring water and drinks that. She says it's good for you, and she's a spry lady indeed.

### **Clothing**

One of the most common ways of catching a cold is sudden changes in temperature.

- If you travel by tube, when you go underground, undo your coat, take it off, remove your scarf after you have become accustomed to the temperature. When you reach your station, start to wrap up again and by the time you hit the street you will feel the benefit of that cosy winter coat.
- If you're susceptible to sore throats wear a light scarf or polo neck all day throughout the winter months.
- Never leave the house with wet hair on a cold day.
- Always keep your feet covered indoors.
- Wear a hat if at all possible.
- If you already have a cold, don't consume milk products - this aids the build up of phlegm.
- Drink lots of water and watch the telly and don't move. If you can go home, do so. Now's the time to let someone else look after you - you deserve it, you feel miserable remember?
- If you're male, expect no sympathy from any female - they'll come up with the child birth pain thing and they do have a point.

## **Vodka**

The Russian cure goes something like this:

- Buy a bottle of pepper vodka.
- Get yourself to a sauna.
- Sit, sweat, and drink the vodka.

If for any reason a sauna is not available, run a bath as hot as you can stand it, sit, sweat, and drink the vodka.

## **Let's Hear it for the Cold**

Mind you, there is an argument that says the cold is a beautiful and wonderful thing. Think about it; school children all over the world yearn for colds, and people with dull jobs love nothing better than calling a sicky. Perhaps the cold should not be exterminated like a pest, but rather, should be welcomed like an old friend. What other reason do you have for skipping work/school, spending all day in bed and being served hot beverages by your loved ones? Colds for the most part are harmless and they give you a chance to re-evaluate just how good it is to feel well.

So, from now on, kiss all the cute people you want.

Source:

<http://h2g2.com/>