

Coughs, Colds & the Flu Information for People with Kidney Disease

Introduction

The common cold is an easily spread and easily contracted illness. The average person can expect to contract a cold about one to three times per year. Cold viruses can survive for several hours on hands or hard surfaces and it only takes brief contact with an infected person or object for transmission of the virus to take place. The virus enters the body when you touch your eyes or rub your nose. Washing your hands frequently is the best way to protect yourself from catching a cold. The most common cold symptoms are a runny and stuffy nose, sneezing, sore throat, and cough. Symptoms usually last about 7 days but may persist up to two weeks in some cases.

The flu is a much more serious condition. Many people who are suffering from cold symptoms incorrectly describe their condition as “the flu”. The flu is contracted by coming into contact with the respiratory secretions of a person with the flu virus. The flu is associated with fever, chills, headache, and muscle aches while the cold is not. Symptoms such as sore throat, cough, and stuffy nose usually persist for 3 to 4 days after the fever is gone.

Flu Vaccination

All individuals with kidney disease 6 months of age or older should be vaccinated yearly against the flu. This is because your immune system does not work as well when your kidneys are not functioning. Ask your family doctor for the flu vaccine between September and December of each year.

Pneumonia Vaccination

All individuals with kidney disease 2 years of age or older should also be vaccinated against pneumonia. This vaccine will protect you against strains of the most common bacteria that causes pneumonia. The vaccine is given once and then repeated 5 years after the first dose. No further vaccinations are needed and you will have life-long protection.

Selecting a Treatment

You should treat each of your symptoms individually rather than using products which provide ingredients to cover every possible symptom. The reasoning behind this is that you likely will only be experiencing one or two symptoms at a time and the more unnecessary medication you take the more at risk you will be for experiencing medication side effects.

High Blood Pressure?

If you have high blood pressure, avoid using syrups, tablets, or capsules that have the words “Nasal Decongestant” on the package. Nasal decongestants work by constricting the veins in your nose to relieve the swollen, congested feeling. If you take a nasal decongestant in the form of a syrup, tablet, or capsule you will cause constriction of not only the veins in your nose but also the veins found elsewhere in your body. This can increase your blood pressure. If you have a stuffy nose use a nasal decongestant spray as very little of the spray will be absorbed outside of your nasal passage.

Diabetes?

Many cough syrups and cough drops contain sugar. If your diabetes is well-controlled, using these medications short-term for a cold is usually not a problem. If your diabetes is not well-controlled or you would like to avoid the extra sugar there are sugar-free formulations such as Balminil DM Sans Sucre or Koffex Sans Sucre. Ask your pharmacist to help you choose a product.

Recommended Products Based on Symptoms

Dry Cough

Ingredient to look for:	Some common brand names:
Dextromethorphan	Benylin DM syrup, Balminil DM syrup, Vicks DayQuil Cough syrup, Koffex syrup

Sugar free syrups: Balminil DM Sans Sucre, Koffex Sans Sucre

Cough Drops: Bentasil, Bradosol, Cepacol, Fisherman's Friend, Halls, Ricola

Sore Throat

Chloraseptic Sore Throat Spray

Stuffy Nose (nasal sprays are preferred)

Ingredient to look for:	Some common brand names:
Xylometazoline 0.1%	Balminil Decongestant, Otrivin [®] Nasal Spray
Oxymetazoline 0.05%	Drixoral [®] Nasal Spray, Mucinex Sinus Nasal Spray

Fever

Ingredient to look for:	Some common brand names:
Acetaminophen	Tylenol [®] Regular or Extra-Strength

Chest Congestion

Ingredient to look for:	Some common brand names:
*Guaifenesin	Robitussin [®] syrup, Benylin E [®] syrup

*Drinking lots of water and using a humidifier likely provides more relief for symptoms than medicines like guaifenesin

When to see a Doctor

If you have severe symptoms that are making you short of breath, last longer than 7 days, or you are coughing up coloured sputum (e.g. green or rust-coloured) you should see a doctor immediately as you may have developed pneumonia.

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