

Beat that cold: Tips for at home
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Runny noses, sore throats and coughs are back in season.

For parents, it's a yearly dance with kids at school and family gatherings that help spread germs, colds and viruses. Since it's impossible for every person to avoid this, how can we minimize the severity of your symptoms? That's where Kimberly Walker, MD, a family medicine physician at OSF HealthCare, comes in with some helpful advice.

Over-the counter options

Not every symptom calls for a doctor's visit, and if you address your signs early enough, Dr. Walker says the length of your cold can decrease drastically.

"Within the first 24 hours, you can take Zinc lozenges," Dr. Walker says. "That helps inhibit the amount of the virus that's getting into your cells and body. But it's only working within that first 24 hours."

For children and adults alike, Dr. Walker offers another easy to find alternative that can provide relief.

"We've used this for many years, the Vick's VapoRub. Luckily, it doesn't sting or burn as much anymore. They have the creams and rubs which are a great source to use for your children to breathe easier and to sleep easier."

Another option that has some health benefits? Celery.

"It has properties where it will numb the back of the throat and helps with sore throats. So, you can give them celery and peanut butter, ants on a log, right? It's a good treat and helps with their sore throat," Dr. Walker adds.

How to treat children with a cold

First and foremost, hand hygiene is key. Turn it into a fun game with your children at home. Remind them to cough into their sleeve and not out into thin air, spreading viral particles around.

"In children we want to make sure they're well hydrated. Make sure they're drinking plenty of fluids, particularly water and not sugar beverages. For any body aches or fevers they may have, given them Tylenol," Dr. Walker says. "You can also do children's Motrin, and cycle that with the Tylenol. Usually those are weight-based dosing, so make sure you know how much your child weighs and pay attention to the directions on the medication boxes."

For babies, medicine isn't always an option. Dr. Walker offers some advice for caregivers to provide comfort to infants with a cold.

“The biggest thing is going to be nasal irrigation with saline and making sure their airways are clear of mucus,” Dr. Walker says. “Really suctioning and getting those airways clear is very important for them.”

How can decongestants help?

“This is going to be a self-limited illness. Decongestants are going to help you breathe better,” Dr. Walker says. “You can also use an antihistamine with the decongestant, something like Claritin-D. It is something that will help you breathe better and rest better.”

But when you’re walking the pharmacy aisle seeing a bunch of different options, how can you choose? Dr. Walker has some tips.

“Afrin is a good decongestant to use, but you can only use Afrin for three days. Flonase is an intranasal steroid, but Flonase has been proven in studies not to help in the common cold. It is helpful with allergies, though,” Dr. Walker adds.

Colds and viruses tend to last one to two weeks. If your symptoms are more serious or linger on much longer than that, reach out to your primary care team and schedule an appointment. You can also consider an in-person or virtual visit to [OSF OnCall Urgent Care](#). A virtual visit is available 24/7.