

Drugs for Common Cold

Common cold generally refers to the infection of the upper respiratory tract, i.e. nose, pharynx, larynx and trachea. This is a very common infectious disease and most of the cases are mild in nature. There are around 200 types of germs capable of infecting the upper respiratory tract and up to now, no vaccines have been found effective in preventing such infection. As most cases are induced by virus, antibiotics do not work for the disease. Patients would generally recover on their own within a week.

There is no cure to common cold. Adequate rest is the key factor in preventing the infection to spread to the lower respiratory tract.

Commonly Used Drugs

Drugs that are often used for common cold include the following four categories:

1. **Analgesics and antipyretics:** Examples are aspirin and paracetamol. Drugs in this category are used for relief in fever and pain such as headache and muscle ache. They may cause perspiration and some would even irritate gastric mucosa and cause stomach upset. Therefore, they should be taken after meals. Proprietary medicines available in the market for common cold generally contain ingredients belonging to this category. Special attention should be paid to the fact that overdose of such medicines on an empty stomach may lead to gastrorrhagia.
2. **Antihistamines:** For alleviating the symptom of runny and stuffy nose. They are also antiallergic and can be used for allergic diseases, such as nasal or skin allergies. Possible side effects include drowsiness, thirst and stomach upset. Patients should therefore drink plenty of water, take the medication after meals and refrain from alcohol, driving or engaging in dangerous activities. Drugs in this category cannot be taken with sleeping pills, tranquilisers or antispastics. For more details, please consult a doctor, pharmacist or dispenser.
3. **Cough Syrup:** Viral infection makes patients suffering from common cold produce large amount of secretion in the respiratory tract, giving rise to frequent coughs with sputum. The function of coughing is to expel the sputum and therefore the germs as well. Some patients, upon recovery, would still have an itchy throat or an urge to cough when exposed to external irritation such as

smoke, dust or chill. This symptom, known as dry cough, is more serious at night and affects the sleeping quality of the patient.

Commonly used cough syrup can be divided into two categories according to their purposes of use:

- A. Expectorants: For increasing secretion of the respiratory tract. Such secretion would not only protect the respiratory tract mucosa but also reduce the thickness of the sputum. Thinner sputum is easier to flow and cough out, thus relieving the cough indirectly. Common expectorants include ammonium chloride, tincture of ipecacuanha and tincture of senega.
 - B. Antitussives: For relieving the cough by suppressing the central nervous system. Some antitussives contain codeine which is slightly anaesthetic and may cause drowsiness. Special attention is therefore required during medication.
4. Other medicines intended for common cold include lozenges and medicinal mouthwash. Their purpose is to lessen throat pain and relieve some other discomforts associated with common cold.

Life Adaptations

People suffering common cold should ensure plenty of rest, take a light diet with easily digestible food, and increase fluid intake in case of fever. They should avoid visiting crowded and poorly ventilated public places to prevent the spread of the disease. Sore throat and dry cough could be relieved by drinking hot water or tea in small portions and inhaling steam as these methods help ease the discomforts caused by the swollen mucosa at the throat.

Prevention of Common Cold

There are over 200 types of germs leading to common cold. No vaccines have so far been identified. Staying happy, ensuring adequate sleep and adopting a balanced diet help enhance our immunity against diseases. We should also pay attention to personal hygiene and maintain good ventilation at home. Avoiding poorly ventilated public places can reduce the chance of coming into contact with people infected with common cold and thus the risk of infection.

Storage of the Drugs

The drugs should be kept in a cool and dry place. Generally, they do not need to be refrigerated unless otherwise stated in the drug labels. Also, they should be stored properly to avoid accidents of mistaken consumption by children.