From an integrated health care approach, we’ve compiled helpful remedies, nutrition and shopping tips so you can stay healthy and survive this cold and flu season.

**How to Tell Colds & Allergy Symptoms Apart**

*by Madison Williams*

Being sick is always the worst feeling, especially when you can’t figure out what you’re actually sick with — a cold or allergies. Often, people think they have a cold when they are really experiencing allergies or vice versa.

Aaron Sapp, MD and MU Student Health Center medical provider, says colds and allergies can have very similar symptoms.

For colds, he asks his patients if they feel sick or have a fever. The cold usually affects the entire body, causing people to feel tired, sore and just sick all over.

For allergies, he asks if they are experiencing an intense runny nose. Allergies usually only affect the nose, eyes and throat. The confusion begins when people mix symptoms together.

“Often people experience an itchy throat and think they must have a cold. But someone can have an itchy throat without feeling sick,” Dr. Sapp says.

**Good, Old-Fashion Chicken Noodle Soup**

Sometimes you just want a good, old-fashioned chicken noodle soup...no fancy ingredients...just great flavor. 6 ingredients and 35 minutes to make a homemade soup that you’ll enjoy.

- 4 c. chicken broth
- Big dash ground black pepper
- 1/2 c. uncooked medium egg noodles
- 1 med. carrot (peeled/ sliced)
- 1 stalk celery (optional)
- 1 c. shredded or cubed chicken or turkey (salad bar or cook your own)

Heat broth, pepper and veggies over medium heat until boiling.

Stir in noodles and chicken. Reduce heat to medium. Cook for 10 min. or until noodles are tender.

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Vomiting dehydrates you and removes minerals from your body. After vomiting, you need to slowly replace what your body’s lost to feel better.

Here are the 6 steps:

1. **REHYDRATE**
   - Get a medium size cup or something similar and fill it 2/3 with water or a sports drink.
   - Schedule a time every 15 minutes — it’s small enough that you won’t throw it up.

2. **PACE YOURSELF**
   - Schedule a short 5-minute break.

3. **INCREASE VOLUME**
   - Drink at 2 to 3 per hour.
   - Drink slowly. You want to keep it down.

4. **ADD FOOD**
   - Switch to other clear liquids like chicken broth or gelatin. If you can see through it — it’s mostly water. Slowly incorporate plain foods like bananas, crackers, plain toast or rice.

5. **SANDWICH**
   - Start off with a plain turkey breast sandwich. Skip the cheese and mayo.

6. **DAIRY LAST**
   - The last thing you should incorporate back into your diet is dairy. It’s the most complicated food group to digest.
   - Yogurt may help restore normal function.

**Cold? Flu? Something Else?**

You’re tired, have a stuffy nose and a sore throat. But how do you figure out if it’s a cold, the flu or allergies? “The symptoms of all three are extremely similar,” says Dr. Susan Even, the Health Center’s executive director. “But some symptoms are present in one illness more than another. Let’s talk about a fever. This is more associated with flu, less with colds and not at all with allergies.”

How fast the symptoms appear is a good indication of what it might be. “You’re fine when you step into class, but by the end you feel like you’ve been run over by a truck,” Even says. “That would be the flu.”

Colds typically start off slow — mild sniffles or cough — and build to the full-on symptoms.

Allergies tend to be more seasonal.

For allergies and flu you can watch the news for local pollen counts and regional flu outbreaks.

WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

“There are always new viruses coming to our campus and community,” Even says. “Typically students catch the flu or colds when their peers don’t cover their coughs and sneezes. Viruses in those droplets land on surfaces that you touch.”

One of the most overlooked ways viruses enter your body is through you touching your face. You scratch your nose or rub your eyes and lay out the welcome mat for the viruses. The number of times you touch your face without paying attention is uncountable, Even says.

That’s why washing your hands (a lot) or using alcohol-based hand sanitizer is so important.

“Although college students are generally very healthy, by living in close proximity to one another and attending large classes they are exposed to more contagious viruses,” Even says. “Individuals infected with the flu virus spread it to others within 6 feet radius through droplets. Even if students don’t feel sick, they may still infect those around them before they show symptoms.”

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Many times health care providers use words that you kind of know, but not really. Susan Even, MD, Health Center’s Executive Director, is breaking it down for you.

Decongestants — I recommend taking these to reduce the amount of mucus you make and open nasal and sinus passages. Sudafed is a well-known brand of pseudoephedrine and you’ll find it behind the pharmacy counter. You can also take phenylephrine. You can take either of these along with the other products listed.

Cough suppressants — these medications reduce the urge to cough. Dextromethorphan is most common and it typically goes by the abbreviation DM. This combined with other products can relieve symptoms and help you get through class without much interruption and get a good night’s sleep.

Cough drops — these reduce coughing by keeping your throat moist and the menthol or eucalyptus provide mild pain relief. Peppermints or lemon drops may help reduce the tickle of a dry cough.

“Unfortunately for colds, flus and coughs, there are no prescriptions we can give you,” Even says. “Antibiotics don’t help with viruses; and at the Health Center we don’t prescribe antibiotics for viral illnesses. However, most items in the pharmacy’s cold section can be taken as directed by adults.”

Call the Health Center for an appointment, if your symptoms aren’t better in 3-7 days, if they get steadily worse or if you have a high fever.

Expectorants — these thin mucus to help it drain better from your nose and sinuses, making it easier to cough up. Mucinex is a popular brand, but any generic over-the-counter (OTC) product with guaifenesin is equivalent.
Natural Remedies

Are there natural cures for colds and flus? Probably not, since there’s no cure for either one. But like some of their over-the-counter (OTC) counterparts, natural remedies can ease symptoms, give short-term relief and shorten the length of time you feel miserable.

**Echinacea**
Most everyone has heard of echinacea. While it’s not proven that it can fight off colds, it may reduce the severity of your symptoms. Start taking it when you start feeling a cold coming on and continue taking it for 7-10 days.

**Zinc**
This mineral has been shown to shorten the length of illness if you start taking it within 24 hours of the first symptoms. However, the FDA says not to use zinc nasal products for colds. Some people have had a permanent loss of smell.

**Vitamin C**
Cold-fighting powers are unproven, but some research suggests it can cut cold symptoms by a day. About 2000 mg seems to be the dose that works, but could also cause diarrhea and upset stomach.

**Chicken Soup**
Eating chicken soup helps cold symptoms in more than one way. The steam eases a stuffy nose and the broth rehydrates you. Looks like grandma was onto something.

**Hot Tea**
Same perks as chicken noodle soup. The steam relieves congestion, fluid soothes your throat and rehydrates you. Green and black teas also have antioxidants, which might help the healing process.

**Salty Water Gargle**
Gargling with saltwater can help a sore throat. Mix 1 tsp. salt into warm water and gargle 4x per day.

**Saline Drops or Neti Pots**
Spraying salt water into your nose can thin the mucus, which makes you less stuffy. You can buy it or make your own - 8 oz. warm water, 1/4 tsp. salt and 1/4 tsp baking soda. Squirt into one nostril while you hold the other closed. If making your own solution, the FDA recommends you either use boiled or distilled water.

**Fever?**
Call your health care provider if it goes over 101°F (see thermometer basics). However, take an over-the-counter analgesic medication, such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen, to bring your fever down so you can be more comfortable.

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Always seek the advice of your health care provider with any questions you have regarding a medical condition, and before undertaking any diet, supplement, exercise or other health program. Products mentioned have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. Such products are not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease.
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**Do I need Antibiotics?**

The short answer is NO. Since viruses don’t respond to antibiotics, we focus on treating the symptoms while the body’s defenses do the rest, Even says.

Antibiotics only work against bacterial infections. It’s become very common in our culture to expect to have a Z-Pak or other antibiotics prescribed to make us feel better, Even says. However, at the Health Center we don’t follow that trend.

“Sometimes students ask for antibiotics and then are upset because we won’t prescribe them,” she says. “But the overuse of antibiotics help create more superbugs that are antibiotic resistant. The medical providers at the Health Center know you want to feel better, but we don’t want to contribute to this health issue.”

**When do I call the Health Center?**

- Symptoms go on longer than 7 days
- Temperatures higher than 100.5°F for more than 3 days
- Symptoms worsen or new ones appear
- Intense chest pain or shortness of breath

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**What’s 100.5 got to do with it?**

No matter your “normal” temperature, medical providers don’t consider an elevated temp a fever until you’ve exceeded 100.5°F. And it will be one of the first questions you’re asked when you call for an appointment.

“Fever is a sign that your body is fighting off an infection,” Even says. “If you are an otherwise healthy person, fevers shouldn’t be dangerous. If it goes on for longer than 3 days, you need to call us.”

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**Medicine Cabinet Know How**

- Antihistamines (drowsy and non-drowsy formulas)
- Antihistamine eye drops
- Pseudoephedrine
- Phenylephrine
- Acetaminophen
- Ibuprofen or Naproxen Sodium (take one or the other, but not together)
- Antacids (i.e. Tums)
- Aluminium or magnesium antacids (i.e. Maalox or Mylanta)
- Omeprazole, famotidine, lansoprazole (i.e. Prilosec, Pepcid,
**What Type of Hand Sanitizer is Best?**

The CDC recommends you use a product with 60% alcohol. Nonalcohol-based products don’t work as well.

**Flu Shot?**

“We know the flu shot may not be a perfect match for the strains that appear because it’s developed the year before, but it gives good protection,” Even says. “So always get it. “Every year, I hear the flu vaccine gave someone the flu,” she says. “But that’s scientifically not possible. The shot doesn’t have a live virus in it. It’s more plausible you were exposed to the virus before you got the shot.”

It takes about 2 weeks for the vaccine to fully protect you and 1-4 days for flu symptoms to develop if you were exposed.

**Toothbrush?**

There’s no reason to throw your toothbrush away after a cold or flu.

**Sore Throat?**

A simple solution is to gargle with warm salt water. “One teaspoon of table salt per cup of warm water can help reduce the pain and swelling associated with a sore throat,” Even says. “You can also take ibuprofen or acetaminophen to reduce the pain and swelling. Just follow the directions on the bottle.”

**What to Do?**

Rest, drink plenty of fluids, use nonprescription meds for symptom control, cover your coughs and sneezes, and wash your hands often so others don’t get what you’ve got.

**Antibiotics Only Work on Bacterial Infections**

Bacteria are single-celled organisms found all over the inside and outside of our bodies. Many are not harmful; in fact, some are actually helpful. However, disease-causing bacteria can cause illnesses such as strep throat. Viruses, on the other hand, are microbes that are even smaller than bacteria that cannot survive outside the body’s cells. They cause illness by invading healthy cells.

Antibiotics, also known as antimicrobial drugs, are drugs that fight infections caused by bacteria in both human and animals. Antibiotics fight these infections either by killing the bacteria or making it difficult for the bacteria to grow and multiply. Antibiotics do not have any effect on viruses.