

How to care for someone with the flu: Home care and treatment

The flu, or influenza, is a contagious seasonal respiratory illness caused by a virus. Flu symptoms usually come on suddenly. They can include joint pain, a fever, a cough, a stuffy nose, and fatigue. In some people they can be mild, while in others they can be severe enough to require hospitalization.

Treatment for the flu is primarily supportive. The main goal is to ease symptoms. The best medical treatment depends on the symptoms that the person has, but may include over-the-counter and prescription medications.

A caregiver can help in many ways, such as providing foods and fluids and making sure that the person can rest comfortably. Continue reading for more advice about caring for a person with the flu.

When a person has the flu, both medical treatments and home care strategies can help.

MEDICAL TREATMENTS

A healthcare provider may prescribe an antiviral medication, such as oseltamivir (Tamiflu). This is suitable for adults and children aged 2 weeks and older.

Tamiflu works best if a person takes it within 2 days of coming down with flu symptoms. While it cannot cure the flu, it can shorten the course of the illness by about 1–2 days.

Antiviral medication may also help reduce the risk of flu complications, including in people with a high risk.

According to one study, for example, antiviral treatment had a protective effect in people aged 65–74 years who were hospitalized with influenza — when they received the medication within 48 hours of experiencing symptoms.

KEEPING THEM COMFORTABLE

An important aspect of caring for someone with the flu is making sure that they get enough rest.

- Make sure that they can rest undisturbed and encourage sleep.
- Offer plenty of liquids, including broths, tea with honey and lemon, and water.
- Provide fresh water continually, with a straw for small sips.
- Provide multiple pillows and soft bedding.
- Administer over-the-counter cough syrups and pain and fever relief medication, as needed.
- Note down doses and times to prevent overmedicating.
- Offer to make small amounts of bland food.
- Help them change their clothes daily, or more often if a fever is causing sweating.

Home remedies

The symptoms and severity of influenza vary from person to person.

The following table will help identify what home remedies and treatments to use, depending on a person's symptoms:

SYMPTOM	TREATMENT
joint pain, muscle aches, a headache, or a fever	over-the-counter medications, such as acetaminophen, or nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, called NSAIDs
a cough	cough medicine and fluids, such as tea with honey and lemon
a sore throat	lemon water, lozenges, herbal teas, ice chips, popsicles, and salt water gargles
a stuffy or runny nose	nasal saline spray, a humidifier, and a warm washcloth on the face
fatigue	naps and limited activity
chills and sweats	sponge baths and wearing lightweight, comfortable clothes
nausea and vomiting	sips of ginger ale, mild tea, dry crackers and other bland foods, lemon drops, and fluids for rehydration

If possible, designate a “SICK ROOM” for the person to stay in. To make it more comfortable:	HELPFUL SUPPLIES: It can help to keep the following handy when caring for someone with the flu:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure that the environment is clean and uncluttered. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • acetaminophen (Tylenol) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a trash can and plastic bags
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use white noise to mask any distracting sounds. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ibuprofen (Advil) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • alcohol-based hand sanitizer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open a window or use an air purifier to allow fresh air to circulate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • washcloths for cool or warm compresses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a cup with straw or a squeeze bottle to encourage drinking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change bedsheets daily. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a thermometer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a humidifier
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cough drops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a menthol rub
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tissues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • face masks

People with the flu require plenty of rest and fluids to help with recovery. Doctors can prescribe antiviral medication to shorten the duration of the flu.

A person may also benefit from home remedies to reduce their symptoms, such as using a humidifier or taking a warm bath. Some supplements could also reduce the duration of the flu, but people should always talk to a doctor before taking them.

WHEN TO SEE A DOCTOR

For most people with the flu, symptoms resolve within 5–7 days without professional medical care. However, a person should see a doctor if symptoms do not improve after several days of rest and home care.

Also, seek medical attention if any of the following develop:

- difficulty breathing, such as shortness of breath
- pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- sudden dizziness or feeling about to faint
- signs of dehydration
- a persistent high fever that over-the-counter medication does not improve
- a sudden worsening of symptoms after they had begun to improve

Anyone providing care who has worries or concerns should ask a medical professional for advice.

