Flu treatments

How can I treat the flu at home?
Flu treatment is the same for most people. For those who are not at high risk of flu complications, the treatments below are recommended and there is no need to call your doctor. However, those who are at risk may require special treatment. See the flu complications section of our FAQ page for when to seek medical help.

- Get plenty of rest
- Drink lots of fluids such as water
- Take acetaminophen/Tylenol® or ibuprofen/Advil® to lower your temperature. **Warning:** Do not give aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid) to children or teenagers who have the flu!

Are antibiotics effective against the flu?
No. Antibiotics are effective against bacterial infections. Influenza and most cases of acute bronchitis (another name for a "chest cold") are caused by viruses. Doctors will sometimes treat the flu and bronchitis with antiviral medications. But antibiotics can't treat these conditions, prevent their spread, or ease their symptoms. It's important to use antibiotics only when they're necessary, because bacteria can develop resistance to antibiotics over time. You can help keep antibiotics effective by not taking them to treat the flu, bronchitis or other viral infections.

Are there medicines that can treat the flu?
Yes, medicines called "antivirals" treat the flu. Examples are Tamiflu® and Relenza®. These drugs fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in the body. If you get sick, antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. These medicines work best when started within 48 hours after you start having symptoms. They may also prevent serious flu complications.

Will everyone need to get antiviral medicines?
No. Certain strains of influenza may be resistant to these medications while other strains may not. Therefore, this will need to be determined by your doctor.

Flu Complications

When should I seek medical help? Are there danger signs I should watch for?

**Children**
Seek urgent medical attention if your child has any of these danger signs:

- Fast breathing or difficulty breathing
- Bluish or gray skin color
- Not drinking enough fluid
- Severe vomiting or vomiting that continues awhile
- Not waking up or not interacting (being listless)
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough. This could be a sign of pneumonia.

**Adults**
Seek urgent medical attention if you have any of these danger signs:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- New or sudden confusion
- Severe vomiting or vomiting that continues awhile
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough. This could be a sign of pneumonia.