

Are Antibiotics Needed For My Child's Runny Nose?

Q & A Guide for Parents

Are antibiotics needed for a runny nose?

No. Antibiotics do not work on viruses that cause colds or runny noses, even if the mucus is thick, yellow, or green.

A runny nose is a normal part of a cold. Your child's doctor or nurse may prescribe other medicine or give you tips to help with symptoms like fever and cough.

What causes a runny nose during a cold?

When the viruses that cause colds first infect the nose and sinuses, the nose makes clear mucus. This helps wash the virus from the nose and sinuses. After two or three days, the body's immune system fights back, changing the mucus to a white or yellow color. When bacteria that normally live in the nose grow back during the recovery phase, they then change the mucus to a greenish color. This is all normal and does not mean your child needs antibiotics.



Why not just try antibiotics?

When antibiotics aren't needed, they won't help and could even cause harm. Taking antibiotics creates resistant bacteria. Antibiotic resistance occurs when bacteria develop the ability to defeat the drugs designed to kill them. Any time antibiotics are used, they can cause side effects and can lead to antibiotic resistance. Side effects of antibiotics can include rash, dizziness, stomach problems, and yeast infections.

How can I help my child feel better?

Contact your child's doctor or nurse for advice on treatment appropriate for your child. In general, consider these other tips:

- Make sure they rest and drink plenty of fluids.
- Use a clean humidifier or cool mist vaporizer.
- Use saline nasal spray or drops.
- For young children, use a rubber suction bulb to clear mucus.
- Older children can breathe in steam from a bowl of hot water or shower.
- Use honey to relieve cough (if your child is at least 1 year old).
- Ask your child's doctor or pharmacist about over-the-counter medicines that can help them feel better. Always use over-the-counter medicines as directed. Remember, over-the-counter medicines may provide temporary relief of symptoms, but they will not cure your child's illness.

Improving the way we take antibiotics can help fight antibiotic resistance and ensure that lifesaving antibiotics will be available for future generations.

To learn more about antibiotic prescribing and use, visit www.cdc.gov/antibiotic-use.

