Over-the-counter (OTC) Medications for Colds and Flu

Be careful, as many of these preparations have combinations of medicines, some of which you do not need. If you take two different medicines, make sure you aren’t getting too much of any one ingredient. Too much of even a safe medicine can be dangerous.

The Lehigh University Health and Wellness Center recommends these ingredients for the following symptoms:

**Stuffed nose (daytime)**
Pseudoephedrine or phenylephrine are similar decongestants that make it easier to breathe through your nose. Since they are closely related to each other, do not take both these medications at the same time. Do not take them too close to bedtime as they can keep you awake.
Find them in *Sudafed* and many common cold preparations.

**Stuffed nose (nighttime)**
Antihistamines such as brompheniramine and chlorpheniramine dry mucous membranes and cause drowsiness.
Find them in multiple cough and cold preparations, especially nighttime formulations.

**Congestion in head or chest**
Guaiifenesin is an expectorant that loosens mucus so your body can get rid of it more easily. It does not generally keep you awake or make you sleepy.
Find it in *Robitussin, Mucinex*, and many cough syrups.

**Irritating (mostly dry) cough**
Dextromethorphan is an effective cough suppressant that does not cause drowsiness.
Find it in some versions of Robitussin and Vicks cough syrups as well as in *Mucinex Dm*.

**Headache, muscle or joint aches**
ibuprofen 200 mg. tablets (*Advil, Motrin*): take 2 tablets every 4 hours with food
acetaminophen 325 mg. tablets (*Tylenol*): take 2 tablets every 4 hours

**Fever**
ibuprofen or acetaminophen as noted above, but do not exceed the daily doses as printed on the bottle, unless recommended by your healthcare provider.
For fever over 101 Fahrenheit, may alternate 2 tablets of acetaminophen with 2 tablets ibuprofen every 2 hours
Chills mean your fever is going up, sweats indicate it is coming back down.

REMEMBER:
• Colds and the flu are viral illnesses, so antibiotics don’t work! The ingredients and medicines above can temporarily relieve symptoms.
• A cold must run its course, but you can prevent complications (ear infections, sinus infections) by drinking lots of fluids and getting extra rest and sleep. If cold symptoms are worsening or not improving after a week to 10 days, call us for an appointment 610-758-3870.
• Tamiflu is a prescription medicine for the flu. It must be started within 2 days of symptom onset, and it may shorten the time you are sick by 1-2 days. It is taken for 5 days.