

Heathgate Medical Practice Self-care leaflet – Common cold

This range of leaflets created by our clinical team provide useful information on a range of conditions that can in most cases be managed by patients at home. Where symptoms persist after a period of self-care or after advice from the local pharmacist, you should consider calling the surgery.

What is the common cold?

The common cold is the name given to symptoms associated with a viral infection in the upper respiratory tract, which includes your ears, nose and throat. It is very common during the winter months.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms often come on slowly and last for 1 – 2 weeks. They can include a blocked or runny nose, sneezing, a sore throat, a cough, raised temperature and a feeling of pressure in your face and ears.

Flu symptoms can often be similar but appear more quickly and are more severe, affecting more than just your nose and throat and make you feel more tired and unwell.

How can I help myself with symptoms associated with the common cold?

You are likely to feel better without medication from the doctor. You should take plenty of rest, ensuring you remain hydrated. Staying warm will help. Using simple medication such as paracetamol, which can be purchased without a prescription and seeking advice from a local pharmacist will help with your symptoms.

Common colds are spread by contact with people who have or are developing a cold. To help prevent colds spreading, make sure you wash your hands frequently, particularly if you sneeze or cough. Use tissues, disposing of them promptly after use.

Antibiotics do not have any effect on the viruses that create a common cold. Antibiotics are only useful in treating bacterial infections and using them inappropriately for common colds is likely to make them less effective in fighting any future bacterial infections.

When should I contact a healthcare professional?

You should do so:

- If symptoms do not improve after three weeks.
- If your symptoms suddenly get worse.
- If your temperature is very high (above 38c) or you feel hot and shivery.
- If you find it hard to breath or develop chest pain.
- If you have a long term medical condition such as asthma, diabetes or a heart, lung, kidney or neurological disease and you feel your cold is affecting the management of this.
- If you have a weakened immune system because for example you are receiving treatment such as chemotherapy.

Further advice on common colds is available at www.nhs.uk