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What to do if you've got the flu

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SCRANTON, Pa. – Even if you're fanatical about washing your hands and do your best to avoid people with obvious symptoms, there is still a chance that you'll come down with the flu this year. While getting the flu vaccine is still the best way to prevent getting the flu, it's not a guarantee that you'll stay healthy. Although it provides protection and is especially important for young children and older adults, it's only about 60 percent effective at preventing the flu.

Therefore, it's best to be prepared with a strategy for combatting the flu.

"There's good news and bad news about the flu," said [Dr. Amit Sharma](#), M.D., MPH, an infectious diseases specialist at [Geisinger Community Medical Center](#) in Scranton. "If you've got it, there's no cure. However, there are some things you can do to ease your suffering and shorten the duration of your symptoms."



Flu Symptoms and Remedies

“Flu symptoms extend beyond just a bad cold and will include fever, nausea and severe body aches,” said Dr. Sharma. “It’s important to treat the symptoms effectively, since they can lead to dangerous health problems like dehydration.”

If you or someone in your family has the flu, the following strategies may help ease some of the unpleasant symptoms. However, before trying any of these remedies at home, always speak with your doctor first for expert advice on how to treat your illness.

- **Fatigue:** The only real way to treat the fatigue associated with the flu is to stay home from work or school and get the rest your body needs. The fatigue you feel happens because your body is working overtime to battle the influenza virus.
- **Aches and pains:** Over-the-counter pain relievers such as ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) and acetaminophen (Tylenol) can help reduce your aches and lower your fever. Pay close attention to medication ingredients and warning labels, since many cough and flu medicines contain ibuprofen or acetaminophen, which makes it easy to overdose.

“No matter how bad you feel, certain at-risk patients should not take any over-the-counter medicines without first talking to their doctor,” said Dr. Sharma.

“Medications, even those you can buy without a prescription, can be harmful to people with liver, stomach or blood pressure issues.”

- **Nausea and vomiting:** Vomiting can lead to dehydration, which can make your nausea worse. Drink plenty of clear fluids or sports drinks to stay hydrated and avoid this vicious cycle. Ginger ale and peppermint tea can also help. If you can’t keep anything down, your doctor may be able to prescribe a medication to help reduce your nausea.
- **Sore throat and congestion:** Lozenges can help



ease a sore throat, but may be hard to tolerate if you're dealing with nausea and vomiting. Use a humidifier to help alleviate the irritation caused by dry indoor air that is common in the winter. Breathing in the steam from your shower or a pot of hot water can help keep your nasal passages clear.

“Home remedies really can help reduce the suffering caused by the flu,” said Dr. Sharma. “Your first line of defense, however, should be a call to your doctor. They can help you manage the symptoms and may prescribe an antiviral medication to help shorten the duration of your illness.”

If you haven't received immunization yet, it's not too late to get the flu shot. The flu season typically lasts from October through May with activity peaking between late November and March.

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