

Hope & Healing

Flu Prevention and Treatment

A heart at peace gives life to the body — Proverbs 14:30

Introduction _____

Each winter the “flu” causes millions of Americans to suffer for a week or so. Most of the sufferers will recover fully after a few days in bed, a few more days of taking it easy, using aspirin, and drinking lots of juices and soups.

Flu, the short name of influenza, is usually mild in healthy children, young adults, and middle-aged people. But, flu can be life-threatening in older people and in those of any age who have heart diseases, emphysema, bronchitis, kidney disease, diabetes, or any other chronic disease. These persons have lowered resistance and are in danger of having a deadly form of pneumonia follow the flu.

The Cause of Flu _____

Flu is caused by a virus that enters our bodies through the nose or mouth and grows rapidly. The infection occurs when the number of viruses becomes large enough to overcome our body's immune system.

Flu is passed when someone infected with the virus coughs or sneezes. Droplets containing the virus explode into the air. People nearby breathe the virus into their own air passages, or they handle something the virus has settled on. Upon rubbing the mouth or nose, the virus on the fingers is transferred to the nose or mouth and the infection is spread. This is why hand washing is so important in flu prevention.

Symptoms of Flu _____

Flu can begin with a sudden, severe headache, fever, muscle aches, watery eyes, a sore throat, chilly feelings, and a dry cough. The course of flu is quite predictable. After 3 to 5 days the fever and cough subside. Then a period of weakness lasting about five days will follow.

Complications of Flu _____

Complications arising from flu are rare, but are serious. **Caution:** If the fever that comes with the flu becomes normal after three to five days and then rises again, this is usually the first sign of another infection and requires a prompt call to your doctor.

A form of pneumonia known as staphylococcal pneumonia that is deadly in infants and the elderly can be the infection that follows the flu.

Other symptoms that may follow flu and will require your doctor's attention are: swollen glands, chest pains, shortness of breath, a skin rash, a cough that causes yellow, pink, or rust-colored mucus, neck stiffness, earache, and thick white or yellow spots at the back of the throat.

Preventing the Flu _____

There are three strains of flu virus, A, B and C. Epidemics of flu are usually of the A strain or B strain; but you can get flu from either. That's why you can get flu more than once in a year.

Flu vaccine is recommended for patients with heart disease, diabetes, kidney disease or pulmonary problems and for those 65 years old or older, and

for college students and healthcare workers. November is the best month to get the vaccine. Flu vaccines give about 75% protection, and if the flu isn't prevented, the attack may still be less severe.

To be effective the flu vaccine must be received yearly. Strains of the virus constantly shift and are never the same year after year. So the vaccine is adjusted yearly to combat the strain expected to cause the most trouble that year.

Most people have little reaction to the vaccine, but if you are allergic to eggs, you shouldn't take it. About one of four people who get the vaccine will get redness where the injection was given.

A smaller number will feel as though they have mild flu within 24 hours and this may last two or three days. If you already have a cold, delay getting the vaccine as the cold symptoms may be made worse for three to four days.

Note: Your best prevention is to wash your hands often. The virus can be transferred to your hands from a doorknob or a telephone. Then, upon rubbing your eyes or nose you will become infected. In fact, you're more likely to catch the flu by shaking hands than by kissing someone.

Teach your children to wash their hands to avoid colds and flu. And, when you or they sneeze or blow your nose when you have a cold or flu, use a tissue and discard promptly into a wastebasket.

Treating the Flu _____

A number of drugs are used to prevent and treat the flu. They can be used in persons with chronic illnesses when an epidemic strikes the area. These drugs can cause headache, nausea, and diarrhea. These clear when the medicine is stopped.

In a flu epidemic year, from 20 to 50 percent of those who have not received the flu vaccine will get the flu. When Tamiflu is used for prevention it must be taken daily as long as flu cases continue to occur in the community.

For those who are healthy, flu is typically a moderately severe illness. For those who are not healthy or well when the flu begins, the infection may be a severe or even fatal illness.

Self-Help _____

If the flu strikes, go to bed as soon as symptoms begin and don't plan to be up and around for about three days, when the fever should fall. Take ibuprofen or acetaminophen for aches and fever, and drink lots of liquids. After the temperature becomes normal plan to take things easy for another two days to give you time to accommodate the weakness that follows the flu.

What About Antibiotics? _____

There are several antiviral medications that if started within a few days of developing the flu will reduce the symptoms and duration of illness. Tamiflu is the most commonly used, although many flu strains are becoming resistant to Tamiflu. Your doctor will need to do a flu swab to help confirm the diagnosis before starting the medication. The biggest side effects of Tamiflu is stomach upset. It is taken for only 5 days. Typical antibiotics are not effective against viruses. Your doctor may prescribe penicillin, erythromycin, or any of a number of other antibiotics if a secondary infection like pneumonia or an ear infection develops.

Controlling the Cough of Flu _____

One of the most irritating things about flu is the cough. You hack and bark without let up, disturbing your attempts to rest. Naturally, you would like to have a cough syrup to stop it. Cough syrups are either "expectorants" or "suppressants." Expectorants are preferred if you're trying to loosen up thick phlegm. In flu there is scarcely any phlegm, so you need something to stop the cough, a cough suppressant. Robitussin DM, St. Josephs for Children, Vicks 44 and others contain dextromethorphan, a drug that calms the cough center. Actually, a cough is protective, so that you don't want to stop it entirely. Dextromethorphan is a safe drug with only drowsiness as an undesirable side effect. And, if you double the suggested dose for adults it will work pretty well, reducing your cough by about 50%, which allows a better rest, but still retains the protection of your cough in getting up phlegm if any has developed.

Summary _____

Flu infections follow a fairly predictable course. Three to five days of aches, pain, fever, cough and headache. Then a few days of weakness follow. Most people will recover within two weeks. A cough may persist in others. If you have diabetes, heart disease, emphysema, chronic bronchitis, kidney disease, a blood disease or any other chronic disease, ask your doctor about the flu vaccine in November. Remember. Wash your hands often during the flu and cold season to keep from picking up the virus from someone else, and teach your children to do the same.

Awaken the Miracles Within You

The Miracle of Words that Bring Peace of Mind

Think of your mind as a radio station. You can change the channel.

Negative thoughts can be changed to words that bring peace.

1. Instead of "It's terrible," try "It's a disappointment."
2. Instead of "It's awful," try "It's a nuisance."
3. Instead of "I can't stand it," try "I prefer it to be different but I accept it."
4. Instead of "I'm devastated," try "I'm sad but I'll survive."
5. Instead of "I shouldn't have said that (or should have)," try "Everyone makes mistakes."

You'll be much happier after you get rid of unwanted thoughts and words.

The recommendations and information in this handout are appropriate in most cases. However, for specific information concerning your personal medical condition, please, consult your doctor.