

How to Be Sick

2 basic mistakes:

Too little care - underestimating your body's need for support and protection while recovering and rebuilding.

- You should not "work through it" or go to work or school sick.
- You should not ignore it or be in denial.
- You should not mask symptoms with unhelpful over-the-counter medications.

Too much care - overestimating your body's need for support and protection while recovering and rebuilding.

- You should not diagnose yourself with an obscure malady (example: cancer, lupus, adrenal failure), especially using Internet sources that usually are directed at *severe* cases of *unusual* conditions.
- You should not enlist the aid of specialists and alternative practitioners for simple issues that your body is well equipped to handle by itself.
- You should not become paranoid or self-pitying. You are the perfect flower of evolution. Your body knows how to heal.

What are danger signs indicating you must see a doctor?

- Respiratory distress - can't get your breath, and getting dizzy. (Go to Emergency Department.)
- Persistent fever (>101F using an oral thermometer) and cough, +/- stabbing chest pain more than occasionally. (Call doctor.)
- No urine for more than 8 hours, and/or urine very dark in color (orange/brown/red). (Call doctor and probably go to Urgent Care or Emergency Department.)



The number one thing I advise is REST WHEN YOU ARE SICK - REST UNTIL YOU ARE WELL.

- I have the hardest time trying to get people to do this! When you are sick, you should not be going to work or school. If you do NOT rest, you are not only spreading contagion through the community, but you are also prolonging your recovery time and necessitating the use of drugs that you otherwise might not need.
- "Resting" means staying in bed or on the couch (except when eating chicken/miso soup and taking menthol steam treatments!). Please rest quietly - no Grand Theft Auto, no Bollywood marathon - keep your environment peaceful and quiet, so your body concentrates on just getting well.



Nose issues:

- Don't blow your nose constantly in an effort to keep the nasal passages open - be gentle.
- Use Vicks or other menthol-eucalyptus rub on your throat and chest, to help open up the passages.
- Homemade vapor rub: 1/4 cup olive oil + 1/4 tsp eucalyptus oil + 1/8 tsp peppermint oil + 1/8 tsp thyme oil (use essential oils from a natural-foods grocery or apothecary). Shake well in a bottle or small jar. Apply a thin layer to the chest and/or throat overnight, covered with a t-shirt - the vapors will loosen the nose congestion.
- Nasal rinses in a hot shower (for example, using a "Neti pot" with saltwater and a pinch of baking soda) help remove allergens that cause mucus drainage. Please don't overuse your neti pot, unless you are trying to temporarily rinse out allergens. Too much sloshing of the sinus openings can irritate them.

- You can also just tolerate a stuffy nose for a while - easier to do if you are resting at home.
- Don't worry about nosebleeds, unless very large clots are coming out, or bright red bleeding doesn't stop with pressure. Lots of folks get broken blood vessels in the nose (and cough up or blow out blood, as a result), when the heat is on and the air is dry. I recommend running a humidifier near you when you are resting and sleeping.
- Wash your hands!



Sore throat:

- Keep the throat warm, e.g. eucalyptus-menthol rub (e.g., Vick's) on the throat, wrapped up with a scarf, t-shirt, or other insulating covering.
- Honey-lemon tea: 1 tsp honey + 1 tsp fresh-squeezed lemon juice in 1 cup boiling water; cool til drinkable. (Honey coats the throat, lemon cuts the phlegm.)
- Honey-lemon garlic syrup: 1 cup honey + juice of 1/2 fresh lemon + 3 cloves fresh garlic. Blend in a blender until smooth. Strain through gauze or nylon stocking, and store well sealed. Write the date on the jar; it keeps for about 3 months in the refrigerator. Give by the tablespoonful for sore throat. (Garlic is antiseptic, mildly anesthetic, and increases circulation to the area.)
- Salt water gargle: 2-3 tsp of table salt dissolved in a glass of water (approx 1½ cups). Gargle whenever throat is sore. Saltwater reduces swelling of the inflamed mucous membranes.

Pain (e.g. sore throat, headache, body aches) or discomfort due to fever:

- Acetaminophen/Tylenol 1000mg, and ibuprofen/Advil 600mg. You can take these together, four times a day (morning, noon, night, bedtime) OR you can alternate them every three hours by the clock. Don't wait until you already feel horrible before taking them.

- The maximum dosage of these, for short-term use, is 4000 mg acetaminophen and 2400 mg ibuprofen per 24 hours.
- If you use NyQuil or other over-the-counter remedies, skip the acetaminophen/Tylenol (most OTC remedies contain it already, and you could overdose).
- Avoid aspirin (salicylate) products during *viral* illnesses. This means no Pepto-Bismol, Alka-Seltzer, Excedrin, or Sine-Off, due to the danger of Reye's Syndrome (liver failure).
- Epsom salts bath, 2 cups in a hot tub, daily while you are ill. These are inexpensive, old-fashioned magnesium-sulfate salts, which help with body aches. (These salts are *not* the same as sulfa drugs or sulfites.) Warm baths - especially with quiet music - also help to wash away stress, an important part of recovering.



Chest congestion and cough:

- I'm not a fan of NyQuil/Dayquil. Please don't use them while you are using prescription and natural medications. [Dextromethorphan is a poor cough suppressant with a lot of drug interactions; phenylephrine is a poor decongestant with a lot of drug interactions; doxylamine is an antihistamine with a side effect of making you sleepy, and shouldn't be used unless one needs an antihistamine; and if a person wants to take Tylenol, they can just take plain Tylenol.]
- If you really truly need a cough suppressant, decongestant, antihistamine, and/or pain/fever reducer, you're better off using plain-and-simple versions that are more effective, allowing you to use lower doses for a better effect. Please don't take multiple versions of the same kind of medicine (e.g. Nyquil + loratidine/Claritin, Dayquil + pseudoephedrine/Sudogest or acetaminophen/Tylenol, etc.). If you use OTC medicines, read the labels carefully.

- Hot herbal tea with honey in it, 4-6 times per day. (Helpful herbs include coltsfoot plant, licorice root, elecampane root, horehound plant, wild cherry bark. Please note that licorice root can raise the blood pressure, so use on short-term basis with normal blood pressure only.)
- Hot chicken or miso soup with pepper (cayenne or black) and garlic in it. This is high in protein and electrolytes, and "warms up" the body.
- Herbal steam bath: Boil 4 cups water. Put it in another pot (flat-bottomed for stability) and add 3 drops eucalyptus oil OR tea tree oil OR lavender oil. (Alternative: 2-3 peppermint tea bags, or a dollop of eucalyptus-menthol ointment/Vick's.) Take the pot to a table and arrange a chair as needed so you can sit comfortably with your face over the steam, but safely away from the hot water. Drape a towel over your head and the pot to create a mini-sauna. Breathe the steam as long as you want - the longer the better. (You can save the water, re-heat it in a microwave dish, and re-use it.)

Eye irritation:

- I don't recommend using plant-based teas, essential oils, or antibiotic ointments on the eyes, unless prescribed by a practitioner who is trained in eye care. If you have impaired vision or persistent eye pain, please call your doctor, because these symptoms may indicate more than a typical side effect of a viral issue.
- Saltwater wash: Boil some water, then dissolve 1/2 tsp salt in 1 cup boiled water (in a clean container). For itching/dryness, use as hot compress with clean cloth or tissue (hold it gently on closed eyes, as hot as you can tolerate, until it cools off. repeat as desired). Use to wipe your eyes clean when they are crusty. Avoid rubbing your eyes. Wash your hands before touching your face!

Belly problems:

- Rehydration solution: the World Health Organization's recipe: better than sports drinks which have a lot of sugar, or "Pedialyte" which is expensive. 2 quarts water (8 cups, 1/2 gallon) +1 teaspoon baking soda + 1/2 teaspoon salt + 3 Tb sugar + 1 cup orange juice (for potassium). If you add the ingredients to warm water, it will be easier to dissolve them. (You can add the orange juice after cooling it). Drink as needed for good hydration with electrolytes.
- BRAT diet: Bananas, Rice, Applesauce, Toast. (Easy to digest, and anti-diarrhetic.)
- Fresh ginger tea for nausea: Buy fresh ginger root from the produce section of your grocery store. Cut a chunk as big as a walnut (doesn't have to be exact) into slices in a mug. Cover with boiling water, then

with a saucer, and allow to cool, covered, until cool enough to drink. May sweeten with honey. (Ginger root has been widely validated for nausea, from food poisoning to seasickness to chemotherapy.)

- Probiotics: yogurt or kefir daily, any type that has multiple live cultures of friendly bacteria in it (read the label). It can be cow, soy, organic or not. Invest in the "good stuff" for the duration of your illness. Nancy's is made locally where I live; Trader Joe's may be made by Stoneyfield, which is also good; Mountain High and Brown Cow are other good brands. If you feel it gets too expensive to buy "fancy" yogurt, remember you can easily make your own from a single culture: See <http://bit.ly/t91511> and <http://bit.ly/v08NMD>
- There are over-the-counter anti-diarrheal medicines, but if you have a virus, it's better to get it out of your system. Anti-diarrheals like Imodium are for chronic issues, not for an acute viral infection. If you see blood in the water or run a fever (>101F) with persistent diarrhea, call your doctor.
- Wash your hands!



Illustrations by mad genius Ryan North. More dinosaur comics available at www.qwantz.com.

Further reading:

These are links to handouts available on my website.
 How to tell a virus from a bacterium, <http://bit.ly/P8gOiv>
 Nasal irrigation (neti pot), <http://bit.ly/OBkF6s>
 Dealing with a cough, <http://bit.ly/QDVijk>
 Pertussis facts (the 90-day cough), <http://bit.ly/bk2TZZ>
 Pinkeye, <http://bit.ly/UF3uEw>
 Dizzy? Dehydrated? Orthostatic blood pressure <http://bit.ly/OBKIPP>