



Most coughs and colds get better on their own.

They're caused by viruses, and antibiotics don't work on viruses. Here's what actually helps — and when to see your GP.



1 in 5

Australians think antibiotics treat a cold — they don't



7–10 days

how long a typical cold takes to clear



Up to 3 wks

a normal cough can linger & still not need antibiotics

Why antibiotics often aren't the answer



Colds & blocked nose

Always viral. They settle in about 7–10 days — and green mucus is normal, not a sign you need antibiotics.



Most sore throats

Usually viral and ease within about a week. Only some are bacterial and need treatment.



Coughs & chest colds

A cough can linger up to 3 weeks while your airways recover — usually without antibiotics.



Sinus congestion

Most clears by itself over 2–3 weeks. Antibiotics rarely speed it up.



Most ear infections

Often viral and settle on their own, especially in older children and adults.



Tummy bugs (gastro)

Almost always viral. Fluids and rest are the treatment — antibiotics can make it worse.

Does green or yellow mucus mean I need antibiotics?

It feels like it should — but coloured mucus is just part of your body fighting a virus, not proof of a bacterial infection. On its own, it's not a reason for antibiotics.



What actually helps you recover



1

Rest & fluids

Your body does the real work — give it rest and plenty to drink.



2

Ease the symptoms

Simple pain or fever relief, lozenges or a saltwater gargle help you cope.



3

Soothe a cough

Warm drinks and honey can calm a cough (never honey under age 1).




4

Give it time


Most infections ease day by day — keep an eye on how you're going.

When to act — and when antibiotics help



See a doctor (or urgent care) if:

- You're struggling to breathe, or breathing fast
- A high fever won't settle, or you feel very unwell
- You start to get better, then suddenly get worse
- Symptoms last well beyond the times shown here
- Stiff neck, a rash that won't fade, or new confusion



When antibiotics are the right call

- ✔ A genuine bacterial infection — some urine, skin, chest or throat infections
- ✔ You're very unwell, or at higher risk
- ✔ Your GP examines you and decides it with you
- ✔ Sometimes a 'wait-and-see' script, used only if you worsen
- ✔ If prescribed, take them exactly as advised

Why using them wisely matters

Every unnecessary antibiotic gives bacteria a chance to learn to resist them — so they may not work when you, or someone you love, really needs them. They can also upset your gut and cause side effects. Hundreds of Australians die each year from resistant infections.

Not always a script — always good care

'You don't need antibiotics yet' is a careful decision, not a brush-off.

We'll treat what you have the right way, and tell you exactly when to come back. — Dr Regu