

# Respiratory tract infections (RTIs)

## A step-by-step guide on how to manage your infection

### What is an RTI?

A respiratory tract infection (RTI) occurs in the upper or lower respiratory tract, causing symptoms<sup>1</sup>. A RTI is usually caused by a virus, but can sometimes be bacterial.

### What are some common symptoms of an RTI?

#### Nasal cavity

- Blocked or runny nose<sup>2</sup>

#### Sinuses

- Pain<sup>2</sup>
- Swelling<sup>2</sup>

#### Lungs

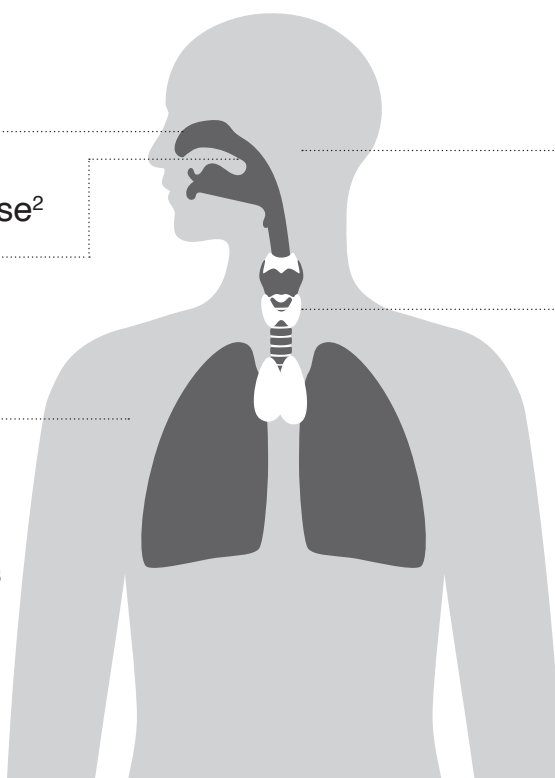
- Cough<sup>3</sup>
- Shortness of breath<sup>3</sup>
- Coughing up mucus<sup>3</sup>

#### Ears

- Earache<sup>4</sup>

#### Throat

- Sore throat<sup>5</sup>
- Swollen tonsils<sup>5</sup>



1

## Help yourself to feel better

Whatever your infection, you can do the following to help.



Take paracetamol to reduce pain<sup>6</sup>. Always follow the instructions on the packet.



Ask your pharmacist for advice on reducing your symptoms.



Get plenty of rest until you feel better<sup>7</sup>.



Drink enough fluids to avoid feeling thirsty<sup>9</sup>.



Use tissues when you sneeze to help stop infections spreading<sup>8</sup>.



Wash your hands regularly and after using tissues<sup>8</sup>.

For more information, visit the NHS website at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk). Most common infections get better without antibiotics. Find out how you can make better use of antibiotics at [www.antibioticguardian.com](http://www.antibioticguardian.com).

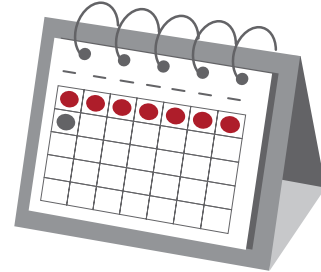
## 2

## Check how long your symptoms last



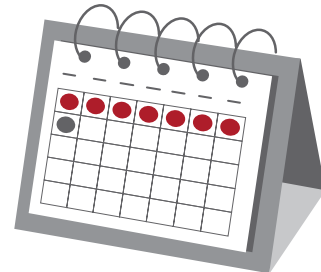
### Earache

Most get better  
by **7 to 8 days**<sup>10</sup>



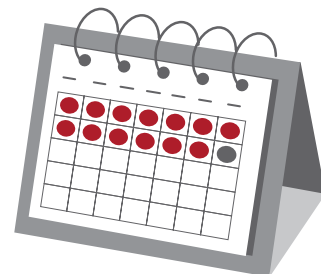
### Sore throat

Most get better  
by **7 to 8 days**<sup>10-12</sup>



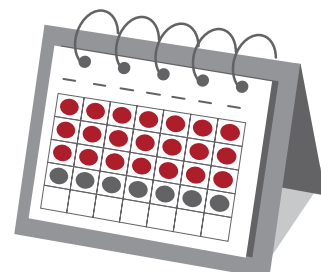
### Cold

Most get better  
by **14 days**<sup>10</sup>



### Cough

Most get better  
by **3 to 4 weeks**<sup>11,13,14</sup>

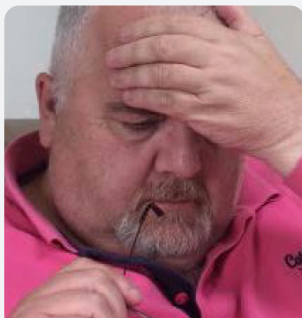


If you are not starting to improve a little by the times given above, visit a pharmacist or contact your GP practice. If you are feeling a lot worse, phone **NHS 111** or **NHS 24** (see step 4).

# 3

## Look out for serious symptoms

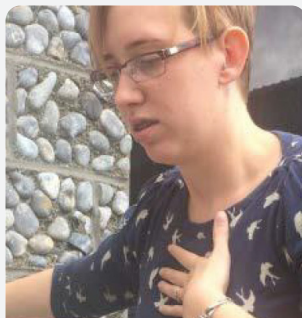
If you have an infection and develop any of the symptoms below, **you should see a doctor urgently**. Ring your **GP practice** or call **NHS 111** or **NHS 24**.



**Severe headache<sup>15</sup>**



**Very cold skin<sup>16</sup>**



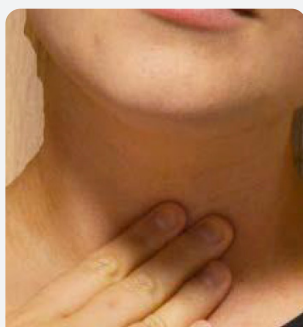
**Trouble breathing<sup>17</sup>**



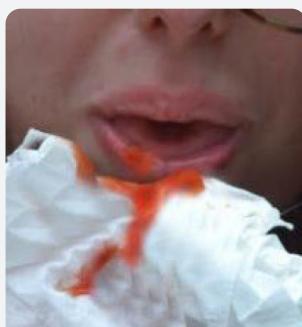
**Feeling confused<sup>17</sup>**



**Chest pain<sup>17</sup>**



**Problems swallowing<sup>18</sup>**



**Coughing blood<sup>18</sup>**



**Feeling a lot worse<sup>2-5</sup>**

# 4

## Where to get help

**NHS England**



when it's less urgent than 999

**NHS 111  
Wales**

**NHS 111** *Wales*

**NHS Scotland**



**Northern  
Ireland**

Contact your  
GP practice



Public Health  
Agency

If you have an **emergency**, call 999 immediately



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