

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 symptoms¹. 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 nose²

Sinuses

- Pain²
- Swelling²

Lungs

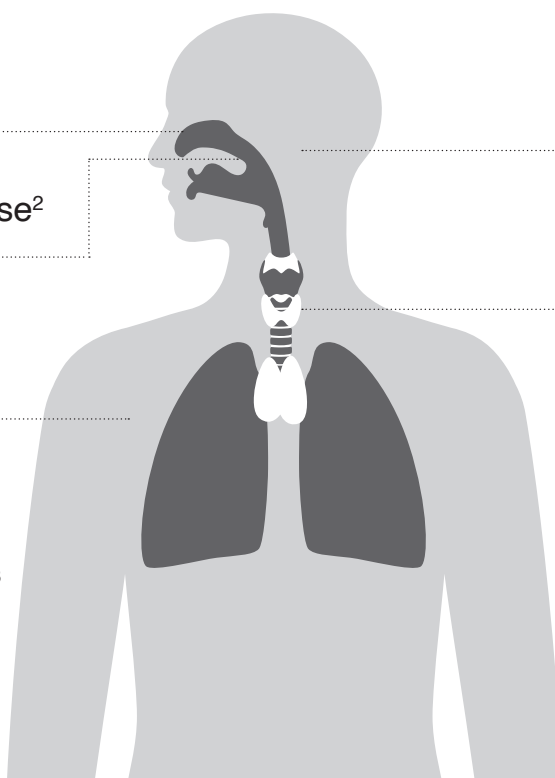
- Cough³
- Shortness of breath³
- Coughing up mucus³

Ears

- Earache⁴

Throat

- Sore throat⁵
- Swollen tonsils⁵



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Help yourself to feel better

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



Take paracetamol to reduce pain⁶. Always follow the instructions on the packet.



Ask your pharmacist for advice on reducing your symptoms.



Get plenty of rest until you feel better⁷.



Drink enough fluids to avoid feeling thirsty⁹.



Use tissues when you sneeze to help stop infections spreading⁸.



Wash your hands regularly and after using tissues⁸.

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

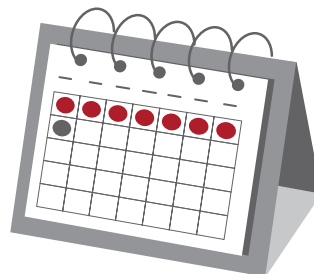
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Check how long your symptoms last



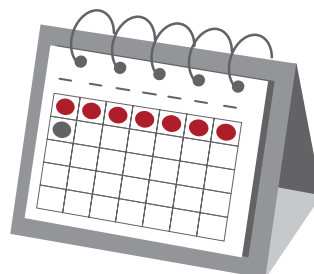
Earache

Most get better
by **3 days**¹⁰ (can
last 7 to 8 days¹¹)



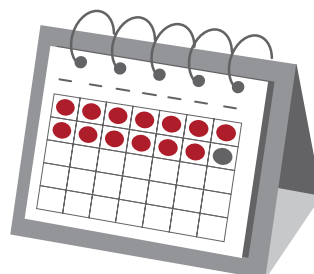
Sore throat

Most get better
by **7 to 8 days**¹¹⁻¹³



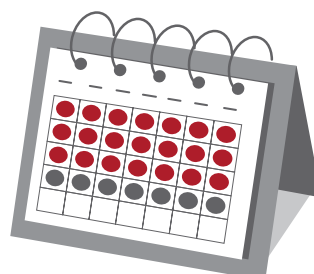
Cold

Most get better
by **14 days**¹¹



Cough

Most get better
by **3 to 4 weeks**^{12,14,15}

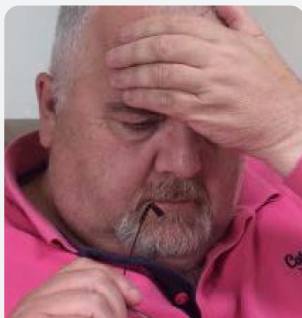


If you are not starting to improve a little by the times given above, visit a pharmacist or contact your GP practice. If you are feeling a lot worse, phone **NHS 111** or **NHS 24** (see step 4).

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Look out for serious symptoms

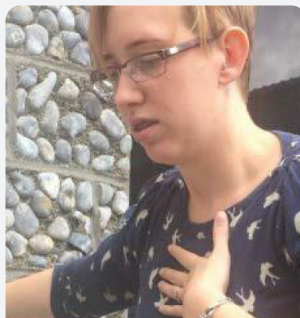
If you have an infection and develop any of the symptoms below, **you should see a doctor urgently**. Ring your **GP practice** or call **NHS 111** or **NHS 24**.



Severe headache¹⁶



Very cold skin¹⁷



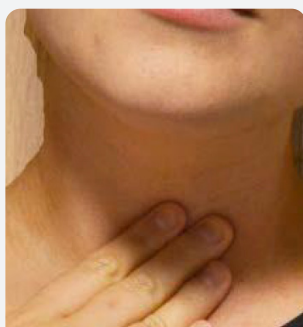
Trouble breathing¹⁸



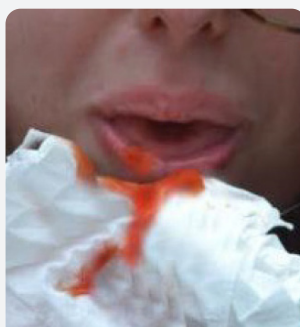
Feeling confused¹⁸



Chest pain¹⁸



Problems swallowing¹⁹



Coughing blood¹⁹



Feeling a lot worse²⁻⁵

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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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