

# Eight cold facts

Mis-information seems to run rampant and “old wives’ tales” are hard to kill. These are some examples of mis- (and myth-) information people swear to about colds. In fact some beliefs that had previously been dismissed may be true: for instance, ["catching a chill"](#) might make you more likely to succumb to a cold virus. Then again, some really are nonsense.

## 1. Colds are caused by a weakened immune system. NOT NORMALLY

Some people with perfectly robust immune systems get colds every winter. Others contract cold viruses but suffer nary a sniffle. Cold symptoms, sniffles, sneezing and coughing, are caused by your immune systems normal reactions to viruses that infect your nose and throat. Only when your body encounters a "stronger" virus or when you have a really weak immunity can allow cold viruses to spread further, and kill.

## 2. Colds happen in winter because central heating dries out your nose. NO

Experiments show that once a cold virus gets in your nose humidity makes little difference. [Inhaling steam](#) may or may not help, but [warming your nose](#) to 43°C might, and if you have a rhinovirus, [spraying your nose with acid](#) (pH4) might help. Some think rhinoviruses, which are related to the enteroviruses that cause diarrhea, are gut bugs that lost their acid tolerance so can no longer get past the stomach. But some do both: hence, the combined misery of "stomach flu".

## 3. Stress causes colds. YES

If you get a cold virus in your nose, you will become infected and develop symptoms, or not, depending on your immune system, which is affected by stress and emotions. Colds are more likely if you recently had a big life event - job loss, death in the family, marriage - and [if you were poor as a toddler](#), because your immune system triggers inflammation reactions more readily. If you are usually happy and calm you may be sick than if you are anxious, hostile and depressed. And if you are the famous American composer [Leonard Bernstein](#), the symptoms disappear when you're absorbed in conducting Mahler's fifth symphony, only to return for the curtain call.

## 4. Feed a cold and starve a fever. MAYBE

Colds rarely give adults fevers. Other diseases that do, such as malaria, might get better faster if you stop eating minerals and vitamins that the germ needs even more than you do. But the muscle pain of even mild colds is caused by muscle wasting, as the body recycles proteins into defensive chemicals. [Eating more protein instead could help](#), and hurt less. So between its warming effect on your upper respiratory tract (and your mood), and the protein, it's true: chicken soup should help.

## 5. Blowing your nose helps clear out the virus. NO

Opinion is divided as to whether a runny nose or indeed any cold symptoms actually eliminate viruses: relieving symptoms with painkillers, antihistamines and decongestants (not antibiotics!) doesn't seem to hurt and more of it could save lots of money in lost work and useless doctor's visits. But a blocked nose is usually down to dilated blood vessels, not snot, and blowing won't help. Blowing your nose forcefully however can [drive viruses and inflammatory substances into your sinuses](#) and spread the misery.

## **6. Green snot means you need antibiotics. NO**

Mucus turns yellow or green whenever you have a bad respiratory infection, viral or bacterial. The color comes from myeloperoxidase, an enzyme in white blood cells which uses an iron-containing heme molecule, which is green, to catalyze chemical reactions that kill germs.

## **7. Large doses of Vitamin C prevent colds. NOT UNLESS YOU RUN MARATHONS OR WORK OUT IN THE SNOW**

This idea, first put about by Nobel laureate Linus Pauling in the 1970s, has been repeatedly disproved but refuses to die. Still, there may be a bit to it: last year a [review of research to date](#), found vitamin C had little effect on most people, but it halved the risk of getting colds for marathon runners, skiers and soldiers on subarctic exercises. It does not cure colds. And while we're here, the herb *Echinacea* [may shorten colds a bit](#) but it has side effects and doesn't prevent colds. Zinc lozenges work better.

## **8. Red wine helps. YES**

Finally, some good news. Contrary to some people's optimistic beliefs, red wine doesn't cure colds, though it may (initially) dull the pain. But a [study in Spain](#) found that people who drank more than 14 glasses of red wine a week (but not spirits or beer) cut their risk of getting a cold by almost half.

Additional Notes:

For quality “Whole-food” Nutritional Support, contact our office so we can suggest the nutritional products that best fit your lifestyle.

Go to [www.DrMcKinzie.com](http://www.DrMcKinzie.com) and click on Nutrition link.

Be careful of taking “processed, synthetic, isolated” vitamins and nutritional supplements. Whole-food based nutrition is a complement of all the naturally occurring vitamins, minerals, phytochemicals and “unknown” beneficial compounds found in raw, vine-ripened fruits and vegetables.

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