What is the Common Cold?
Did you know that the common cold is different from the influenza virus otherwise known as the “flu”? The common cold usually begins with scratchy or sore throat, coughing, sneezing, stuffy nose and nasal discharge. These symptoms are expected to last up to one to two weeks. Adults and children suffer from the common cold but children are more likely to present with colds more frequently than adults. Conversely, the elderly and people with weakened immune systems are often most susceptible. Presently, the common cold is a widespread illness in the United States and is often the most common reason for both emergency room and primary care physician visits. The common cold is not seasonal, it usually occurs year round. There are no cures for the common cold as it is caused by viruses, rhinovirus being the most common cause. However, some natural products are commonly used to alleviate some of the symptoms despite inconsistent recommendations.

Natural Remedies and Cold Treatment

Echinacea
Echinacea has anti-inflammatory activity and is said to extensively reduce the severity and duration of cold symptoms when taken orally in the early stages of a cold. Preparations of the *Echinacea purpurea* species have a better effect on common cold than other species. An effect of echinacea is mostly seen if started when symptoms are first noticed and continued for 7-10 days. Patients with autoimmune diseases such as multiple sclerosis, systemic lupus erythematosus, rheumatoid arthritis, should use echinacea with caution or preferably avoid it. Despite echinacea’s general acceptance and effects, this may not translate into a definite benefit when it comes to treating and preventing the common cold, therefore it is not recommended.

Vitamin C
Vitamin C helps in maintaining normal immune function and is therefore used in conditions such as the common cold. Vitamin C is obtained from food and other sources as humans do not make it. People who take vitamin C supplements regularly might have a decrease of one to one half days in duration of cold symptoms. Vitamin C supplements taken after a cold starts do not appear to be helpful. Diabetic and patients known to have kidney stones should check with their doctor before taking vitamin C. While vitamin C has its positive effects in our bodies it has been found to have little to no benefit in preventing or treating the common cold.

Zinc lozenges:
Zinc, the second most abundant trace element in the body, is also a biologically essential trace element that plays a role in immune function. Zinc lozenges are used orally for the treatment of common cold in adults. Zinc gluconate or acetate is the general form used in common cold to decrease duration of cold symptoms. Both forms provide approximately between 9 to 24 mg of elemental zinc per dose. It should be taken within 48 hours of onset of symptoms and dissolved in the mouth every 2 hours while awake. However, zinc has a metallic taste, can cause nausea, vomiting and a possibility of copper deficiency if higher doses are taken, hence, caution should be taken while taking this medication. Recommendations whether or not zinc has a positive effect on cold are inconsistent.

When to see a Doctor
- When temperature is higher than 100.4° F
- When symptoms last more than 10 days
- When symptoms are not relieved with over-the-counter treatment