There is no cure for the common cold - not from your doctor or from a drug store. There are, however, many medications available to help alleviate cold symptoms. It can be a challenge to decide which products will help your specific symptoms. There are many "shotgun" remedies loaded with up to seven different drugs that may claim to aid all your symptoms at once. These combination products are expensive to use and the doses may be inadequate for severe symptoms or too potent for mild symptoms. A more sensible (and less costly) approach is to choose effective single-ingredient drugs to target just the symptoms you have, based on their severity.

Be a cautious cold medication consumer. Review your symptoms, consult your health care provider or pharmacist as needed, and READ the LABELS on the products you are choosing. Follow recommended dosages on the product label.

Decongestants - for congestion, stuffy nose, and ear pressure
Congestion is caused by swelling of the mucous membranes in the respiratory passages. Drinking extra fluids and taking hot, steamy showers can help relieve this congestion. Decongestants help to shrink swollen membranes and reduce stuffiness. Usually, decongestants have no side effects, but some people notice nervousness and trouble falling asleep. Don't use these if you have high blood pressure, diabetes, thyroid disease or heart disease. Pseudoephedrine is a popular decongestant and is available as "over-the-counter" medication (no prescription required) but is stored behind the pharmacist counter and a signature and identification is required for purchase.

Nasal sprays are not advised because use over 2-3 days may actually increase congestion ("rebound effect"). Antihistamines may help dry and decrease drainage and symptoms.

Cough medications - to loosen mucus in the lungs and help control the cough
There are two types of coughs: productive and nonproductive. A productive cough performs a useful function by loosening mucus and bringing it up, helping the body to rid itself of the secretions caused by the virus. A nonproductive cough, which may also warrant treatment, is the dry, hacking kind that can interfere with sleep.

An expectorant cough product that contains Guaifenesin™ may help to liquefy and loosen secretions and improve the cough's production. Ample fluid intake can help loosen secretions, so cough sufferers should consume eight cups of fluid each day. Also, try humidifying the air with a cool mist vaporizer. Menthol additives are not recommended. Inhaling too much of the ointment can make your cough less productive and more irritating to the lungs.

Some recent research is showing that naproxen is helping relieve cough. Naproxen is a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medication that is also useful in helping with aches associated with a cold.

Ache, pain and fever medications – for pain symptoms and fever relief
About 25% of people with colds have headaches, 10% have muscle aches and 1% run mild fevers. All of these symptoms respond well to the three standard nonprescription pain relievers: acetaminophen, ibuprofen or aspirin.

Acetaminophen and aspirin can be found in many "shotgun" remedies, but it is cheaper to buy the straight pain reliever. One caution about pain relievers: studies have shown a strong link between aspirin and Reye's syndrome, a rare but potentially fatal illness that strikes children and teenagers. Choose your pain and fever medications carefully and take as directed.

Sore throat remedies – to relieve a scratchy, sore throat
An inexpensive and easy way to help relieve a sore throat is to gargle with salt water. Mix 1/2 teaspoon table salt in an 8 oz. glass of warm water; gargle every 2-4 hours as needed. Hard candies or cough drops may also be helpful to relieve sore throat pain. If your throat is extremely sore, lozenges containing a topical anesthetic that numbs the throat tissue can help. Take as directed on box. If your sore throat persists, always check with your physician.
Summary
Keep in mind that all these remedies only relieve the symptoms of a cold. Rest and a healthy diet can also improve how you feel, and time will allow the cold to run its course. If you want to learn more about caring for your cold, or if you wish to receive over-the-counter medication for your cold, visit the:

**Health Resource Center**
McKinley Health Center
Information/HRC counter in the Main Lobby
333-6000

**Health Resource Center**
Illini Union
Room 40, (lower level)
244-5994

Reference
Cecil's Textbook of Medicine, 21st ed. (2000)

If you are a registered University of Illinois student and you have questions or concerns, or need to make an appointment, please call: **Dial-A-Nurse at 333-2700**

If you are concerned about any difference in your treatment plan and the information in this handout, you are advised to contact your health care provider.

Visit the McKinley Health Center Web site at: [http://www.mckinley.illinois.edu](http://www.mckinley.illinois.edu)