Upper Respiratory Infection/Common Cold

URIs/common colds are a benign self-limiting syndrome that is the most common acute illness in the U.S.

What causes a URI/common cold?

• Usually caused by a virus, most commonly Rhinoviruses and Coronaviruses.

How is a URI/common cold spread?

• It is spread by close contact with someone who has the illness. It can be spread by hand contact or droplets that become airborne with sneezing or coughing.

What are symptoms of a URI/common cold?

• The following symptoms can occur to varying degrees: cough, runny nose, nasal congestion, sore throat, headache, and/or sneezing.

How is it treated?

• There is no cure for URIs/common colds. Antibiotics will not work against viruses. Treatment is mainly symptom management and rest.

When do you need to call a doctor or nurse practitioner?

• Fever greater than 100.4°F (38°C) that is accompanied by chills, difficulty breathing, asthma exacerbation, or loss of appetite.
• Cough that lasts longer than 10 days.
• Chest pain with coughing, coughing up blood, or shortness of breath.
• Severe pain in your face or forehead, severe and persistent vomiting, fainting, or feeling like you are about to faint.

What can you do to feel better?

• Stay home, rest, drink plenty of fluids, gargle with warm salt water to help soothe sore throat, and use saline nasal sprays as needed.

Source: UpToDate© 2013, Common Cold in Adults.
• Avoid alcohol and smoking.
• Treat the symptoms with over-the-counter medications but first make sure with your doctor or nurse practitioner that it is safe for you to take these medications especially if you are taking other medications that could interact. Examples:
  o **Analgesics** such as Tylenol or Ibuprofen 2 tabs every 6 hours as needed for pain or fever.
  o **Nasal decongestants** such as Phenylephrine or Sudafed 1-2 tabs every 6 hours as needed for nasal congestion/runny nose.
  o **Expectorants** such as Robitussin 2 tsp. every 6 hours as needed for cough.
  o **Antitussives** such as Dextromethorphan (Delsym) as directed.