



## Cold and Flu Myths

It's likely you'll wake up at least once this winter with that familiar feeling: a scratchy throat, stuffy nose and a lingering headache. Welcome to the cold season.

Every winter brings a barrage of sniffles, sneezes, coughs and colds. However, most people don't run to the doctor at every hint of a cold or flu. Instead, they turn to the age-old motherly wisdom that's been passed down through the generations. You know, all those things that supposedly help prevent or treat common cold-weather ailments.

At some point when you were a child, your mother may have told you not to leave the house with a wet head. "You'll catch a cold the minute you walk out that door," she would say. As children we laughed it off, but as adults we sometimes wonder, was what she said true?

So which of the preventions and cures are really valid? Can you *really* catch a cold from not drying your hair before going outside in the winter? To help you inoculate yourself against the germs of unfounded advice, here is a list of common myths and the truths that lie within them.

### **Cold weather makes it easier to catch a cold**

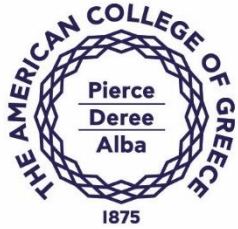
**Fiction:** Cold weather has nothing to do with catching a cold. Many people become ill due to the fact that we tend to spend more time indoors in close contact with other people in heated homes. In heated close quarters, germs are more easily passed from person to person.

**Fact:** Exposure to cold weather does not bring on a cold or flu. It can, however, cause pneumonia, which can develop when someone already has the flu. This is the most serious complication of the flu and is more likely to occur in the elderly and people whose immune systems have been weakened by other medical conditions

### **It's easier to catch a cold if you go outside with wet hair**

**Fiction:** The only way to catch a cold or flu virus is if you come into contact with one. Having a wet head or wet feet will lower body temperature and make you feel colder, which in turn can reduce resistance to a virus or cold, but you will not get sick purely from having wet hair in cold weather.





## Know the Facts

## Health



### Feed a cold, starve a fever

**Fiction:** It is extremely important to stay hydrated when you're sick. Starving a fever by not drinking plenty of water and juice could do even more damage. Likewise, overeating when you have a cold is not ideal either. It is important to eat, but you should not overindulge. Eat enough to satisfy your appetite, and make sure to drink plenty of fluids

### Large doses of vitamin C can prevent colds and cure them quickly

**Fact:** These claims have not been proven. Still, it is important to one's overall health to consume the minimum daily requirement of vitamin C.

### Chicken soup and hot toddies will help you feel better

**Fact and Fiction:** It is true that warm chicken soup will make a sore throat feel better. However, chicken soup does not have any special medicinal healing power to cure a cold.

Along with chicken soup, the notion that hot toddies will provide relief is absolutely false. On the contrary, when you're sick, it's important to avoid alcohol. Beverages containing alcohol contribute to dehydration, which can compound the effects of a cold or the flu.

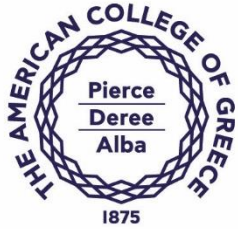
### Herbal remedies are helpful for treating colds

**Fact:** An herbal remedy will not cure your cold, but in many cases an herbal remedy will alleviate cold symptoms and make you feel better. For many people, head and chest congestion are the most irritating aspects of being sick, because a stuffy nose and heavy head make it difficult to sleep. Humidifiers and steam inhalations used in conjunction with herbal aromas can provide substantial relief from head and sinus congestion and help soothe an itchy or scratchy throat.

### Antibiotics will help cure a cold

**Fact:** Most respiratory illnesses are caused by viruses; antibiotics are only an effective treatment for bacterial infections, and so will not help speed up recovery from a virus. The most common infection antibiotics cure is a streptococcal infection, commonly known as strep throat.





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### Kissing spreads colds

**Fact:** With colds, just about the safest contact is a kiss, because there are few viral particles in saliva. By contrast, secretions from the eyes and nose have high concentration of viral particles. If you rub your eyes then shake hands, your cold will spread much faster than with a kiss.

### It's dangerous to exercise when you have cold or flu symptoms

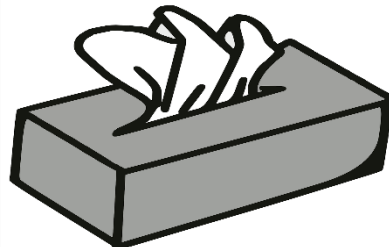
**Fact:** Provided you're not running a fever, some mild exercise (such as a brisk walk) will help your antibodies fight the virus.

### Only people with weakened immune systems can catch a cold

**Fact:** Because the common cold is a viral illness, anyone is susceptible if they come into contact with the virus, although those with a weakened immune system can be more susceptible. That's why it's so important to wash your hands with soap and water regularly. Be vigilant about maintaining a healthy lifestyle to avoid catching a cold at all.

### You can catch the flu from getting a flu shot

**Fiction:** The flu vaccine is made from an inactivated virus, so you cannot catch the flu from a flu shot. However, it's not uncommon to experience some soreness at the point where the injection was administered. On occasion, the shot can leave some people feeling a little under the weather for a few days.



### You are not contagious without a fever

When and for how long a cold or flu virus is contagious is an intriguing question. The presence of fever is not a good indicator, since fever usually doesn't accompany a cold. Children can be infectious for up to two days before they develop a single sniffle. Adults are most contagious at the peak of their sneezing and coughing, which usually comes in the first two days. However, an adult will continue to emit the virus, although in weaker concentrations, for up to a week.

So, was your mother right? Probably not always, but then she was only trying to make sure you were healthy. Knowing the truth behind the myths will help you better prevent and treat any cold or flu bug, and that will definitely keep mom happy.

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#### Sources

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