

Got the Flu? Here's What To Do.

You didn't get around to getting your flu vaccine and now you're paying the price. You've got the classic flu symptoms; headache, fever, scratchy throat—the works. Your first move? That depends on your situation.

If you are at high risk of flu complications because you are pregnant, younger than 5, older than 65, or suffer from a chronic disease (or live with a high-risk person), ask your doctor if you're a candidate for an antiviral drug such as Relenza (zanamivir). Taking one of those drugs within 48 hours of the onset of symptoms can shorten the duration of flu symptoms by a day or two, reduce the chance of spreading the disease, and may reduce other complication risks.

Other people should stick with the tried and true: getting plenty of sleep and fluids (water and juices are best), and over-the-counter drugs. Acetaminophen, ibuprofen, and naproxen, which work well to reduce fever, headache and inflammation, are generally more effective than multi-symptom products such as *NyQuil* and *TheraFlu*, which contain medicines you probably don't need. Don't bother with antibiotics—they treat bacterial infections, not viruses such as the flu or colds.

Two natural remedies might also be worth considering. Some research suggests that these supplements—elderberry extracts and n-acetyl cysteine—may help to relieve flulike symptoms. Other natural remedies, including echinacea, ginseng, vitamin E supplements, and the homeopathic medicine *oscillococcinum*, have been shown to be of no use in preventing the flu or lessening its symptoms.

Call your doctor (or head to an ER) if you experience any of the following:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flulike symptoms that improve but return with a fever and more severe cough

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