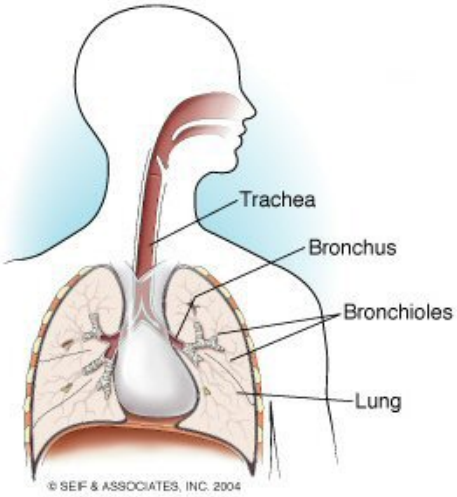
Upper Respiratory Infection in an Infant

An upper respiratory infection is also called a URI. URI is the medical name for the common cold. It is an infection of the nose, throat and upper air passages. The common cold in an infant can last up to 2 to 3 weeks. Your child should be feeling a bit better after the first week.



Some children get other problems with a URI. The most common problem is ear infections. If anyone smokes near your child, there is a greater risk of more severe coughing and ear infections with colds.

CAUSES

A URI is caused by a virus. A virus is a type of germ that is spread from one person to another.

SYMPTOMS

A URI can cause any of the following symptoms in an infant:

- Runny nose.
- Stuffy nose.
- Sneezing.
- Cough.
- Low grade fever (only in the beginning of the illness).
- Poor appetite.
- Difficulty nursing or sucking on a bottle because of a plugged up nose.
- Fussy behavior.
- Rattle in the chest (due to air moving by mucus in the air passages).
- Decreased activity.
- Decreased sleep.

TREATMENT

- Antibiotics do not help URI's because they do not work on viruses.
- There are many over-the-counter cold medicines. They do not cure or shorten a URI. These medicines can have side effects that may make your infant more uncomfortable. These medicines are best avoided in infants. Only use these if your infant's caregiver suggests them.
- Cough is one of the body's defenses. It helps to clear mucus and debris from the respiratory system. Suppressing a cough (with cough suppressant) works against that defense.
- Fever is another of the body's defenses against infection. It is also an important sign of infection. Your caregiver may suggest lowering the fever only if your child is uncomfortable.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Prop your infant's mattress up to help decrease the congestion in the nose. This may not be good for an infant who is active in bed.
- Use saline nose drops often to keep the nose open from secretions. It works better than suctioning with the bulb syringe, which can cause minor bruising inside the child's nose. Sometimes you may have to use bulb suctioning, but it is strongly believed that saline rinsing of the nostrils is more effective in keeping the nose open. This is especially important for the infant who needs an open nose to be able to suck with a closed mouth.
- Saline nasal drops can loosen thick nasal mucus. This may help nasal suctioning.
  - Over-the-counter saline nasal drops can be used.
  - Fresh saline nasal drops can be made daily by mixing ¼ teaspoon of table salt in a cup of warm water.
  - Put a drop or two of the saline into one nostril. Leave it for a minute, and then suction the nose. Do this only one side at a time.
- Offer your infant fluids to help keep the mucus loose.

- A vaporizer or humidifier sometimes may help to keep nasal mucus loose.
- If needed, clean your infant's nose gently with a moist, soft cloth.
  - Before cleaning, put a few drops of saline solution to wet the areas.
- Wash your hands before and after you handle your baby to prevent the spread of infection.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- The cold symptoms last longer than three weeks.
- The infant has a hard time drinking or eating.
- Loss of hunger (*appetite*).
- Your infant wakes at night crying.
- Pulling at the ear.
- Fussiness not soothed with cuddling or eating.
- Cough causes vomiting.
- Your infant is older than 3 months with a rectal temperature of 100.5º F (38.1° C) or higher for more than 1 day.
- There is ear and/or eye drainage.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Your infant is older than 3 months with a rectal temperature of 102º F (38.9º C) or higher.
- **Your infant is 3 months old or younger with a rectal temperature of 100.4º F (38º C) or higher.**
- The infant is short of breath. Look for:
  - Rapid breathing.
  - Grunting.
  - Sucking of the spaces between and under the ribs.
- The infant is wheezing (high pitched noise with breathing out or in).
- The infant pulls or tugs at his/her ears often.

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