

Even if left untreated, most influenza infections will go away within 1 week, although a cough and fatigue may persist for a little longer.

If you find that your condition is not getting better or if after a week you're feeling worse consult your doctor. It's also important to be careful about dehydration so be sure to drink plenty of fluids.

What you need:

Thermometer. One symptom of the flu is a temperature of 101 and above for adults; 103 to 105 for children.

Facial tissues. Influenza is a respiratory illness that is spread by inhaling infected droplets from a person who has the virus. Therefore, it's important to cover your mouth and nose when you **sneeze** or cough. Keep a good supply of facial tissues nearby — every time you cough or sneeze into one, throw it away. Cover your cough or sneeze with your sleeve if you do not have a tissue.

Soap. Hand washing with **soap** and warm water is considered one of the surest ways to prevent the flu. Wash your hands for 15 to 20 seconds, or about the time it takes to sing “Happy Birthday” — twice. If water and soap are unavailable, alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers, available in most drugstores or supermarkets, are also helpful in stopping the spread of the flu virus. No water is needed, but be sure to rub the gel until your hands are dry. Soap and water are always the first choice if available as they are more effective.

Ibuprofen or acetaminophen. Ibuprofen-based fever reducers can lower a temperature for up to six hours and ease muscle and joint aches. Acetaminophen lowers fever for up to four hours.

Decongestant. Heavy congestion is a major symptom of the flu. An over-the-counter product containing pseudoephedrine can provide relief for adults.

Avoid:

Cough medicines. If you have phlegm or a lot of excess mucous, it's important to cough it up and spit it out. Phlegm keeps the virus in the **body**. For that reason, doctors don't recommend taking a cough suppressant during the day, although it's acceptable to take a cough medicine at night to help you sleep.

Mixing doses. Use caution when mixing over-the-counter drugs. Be aware of specific ingredients, especially acetaminophen, in different medications. It's easy to overdose on individual ingredients, so it's important to read the label and follow instructions.