

DECONGESTANTS

What are decongestants?

Decongestants are a type of medicine that can provide short-term relief for a blocked or stuffy nose (nasal congestion). They can help ease the symptoms of conditions such as colds and flu, hay fever and other allergic reactions, and sinusitis. They work by reducing the swelling of the blood vessels in your nose, which helps open up the airways.

Decongestants are available as:

- nasal sprays
- tablets or capsules
- liquids or syrups
- flavoured powders to dissolve in hot water

Some products may just contain decongestant medication, but many are sold as "all in one" remedies that contain decongestants, painkillers and/or antihistamines. Most decongestants can be bought over the counter from pharmacies without a prescription.

Please make sure you seek advice from a pharmacist if you're taking other medications as decongestants can increase or decrease the effect of some other medications.

Other remedies

You may also find that the remedies below relieve some of your symptoms:

- Gargling and menthol sweets - some people find gargling with salt water and sucking on menthol sweets can help relieve a sore throat and blocked nose
- Vapour rubs - vapour rubs can help babies and young children breathe more easily when they have a cold. Apply the rub to your child's chest and back. Don't apply it to their nostrils because this could cause irritation and breathing difficulties
- Nasal saline drops - nasal saline (salt water) drops can help relieve a blocked nose in babies and young children
- Vitamin and mineral supplements - there is some evidence to suggest that taking zinc supplements within a day of the symptoms starting will speed up recovery from a cold and reduce the severity of symptoms. However, there is currently little evidence to suggest that taking vitamin C supplements is beneficial when a cold starts.

More information about decongestants can be found at www.nhs.uk