

Cold Sores

These are blisters which form around the mouth and inside the nose; often appearing towards the end of a [cold](#).

What to look for

- Itching or tingling in the skin in the affected area
- A number of blisters usually occur in the one spot filled with a yellowish or white fluid red, painful sore on or near the mouth, or on fingers.
- Swollen, sensitive gums of a deep red colour.
- A fever, flu-like symptoms

Cold sores, are a painful infection caused by the [herpes simplex virus](#). They may show up anywhere on your body but are most likely to appear on your gums, the outside of your mouth and lips, your nose, cheeks, or fingers.

Blisters form, then burst within 2 to 4 days and then start to heal by drying up. A crust develops and eventually falls off, revealing new skin underneath. The cold sore will heal itself usually within 14 days.

Although cold sores generally are not serious, the infection may be life-threatening for anyone who has [AIDS](#) or whose immune system is depressed by other disorders or medications. In infants, who usually contract the virus during birth, the infection may spread to other organs, causing serious complications or even death.

Blindness can be the result if the infection from a cold sore spreads to the eye.

Causes

Cold sores are caused by the herpes simplex virus, which is transmitted by such forms of contact as kissing an infected person or sharing eating utensils, towels, or razors. A person with a cold sore who performs oral sex on another person can give that person [genital herpes](#).

Sores may develop as late as 20 days after exposure to the virus. Once the virus enters your body, it may emerge years later at or near the original site of entry. The herpes virus remains hidden in the skin lying dormant between attacks. The virus may be triggered by certain foods, [stress](#), fever, [colds](#), [allergies](#), [sunburn](#), and menstruation.

Traditional Treatment

You can't cure a cold sore, but you can relieve the pain with over-the-counter products. Also it is wise to avoid spicy or acidic foods.

If your cold sore is especially painful or irritating, your doctor may prescribe a stronger medication.

Alternative/Natural Treatments

Several alternative therapies may help to speed healing and prevent sores from coming back.

Aromatherapy – Applying [geranium](#) (*Pelargonium odoratissimum*) or [eucalyptus](#) (*Eucalyptus globulus*) oils to cold sores every hour may help reduce pain and speed healing of the sores. Aromatherapists also strongly recommend that [tea tree oil](#) (*Melaleuca* spp.) with its antiseptic properties be used.

Herbal Therapies – To dry up a cold sore, herbalists recommend applying witch hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*). Herbalists also recommend applying extracts of [echinacea](#) (*Echinacea* spp.), [nettle](#) (*Urtica dioica*), [goldenseal](#) (*Hydrastis canadensis*), and [myrrh](#) (*Commiphora molmol*) to speed healing. To dry up a cold sore, herbalists recommend applying witch hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*). Herbalists also recommend applying extracts of [echinacea](#) (*Echinacea* spp.), [nettle](#) (*Urtica dioica*), [goldenseal](#) (*Hydrastis canadensis*), and [myrrh](#) (*Commiphora molmol*) to speed healing.

Dietary Considerations

Avoid eating nuts, chocolate, brown rice, oats, alcohol, caffeine, sugar and seeds. Instead, eat foods high in lysine, such as kidney beans, split peas, and corn.

If you have more than three cold sores a year, take 500-mg lysine supplements every day. Double the dosage when you feel yourself developing another sore.

At-Home Remedies

- Apply ice to relieve pain.
- Apply [vitamin E](#) oil to help sores heal.
- Avoid becoming too stressful
- Use Number 15 lip balm sunscreen.
- Cover your cold sore with petroleum jelly.

Prevention

- Don't kiss someone who has a cold sore or use the same utensils, towels, or razors.
- Wash your hands after touching a cold sore.
- Don't rub your eyes after touching your cold sore; you could develop corneal herpes, which may lead to blindness if left untreated.
- Don't touch your genitals after touching your cold sore; you could develop genital herpes.
- Replace your toothbrush.
- Take lysine supplements.

When to seek further professional advice

- You develop a high fever and/or chills.
- Your sores are very painful.