

21

The Common Cold

CHIEN LIU

The common cold is a self-limited clinical syndrome in which nasal catarrh is the predominant feature. Fever or other constitutional symptoms are absent. Complications are rare, but sinusitis, pharyngitis, and lower respiratory tract infections may follow. It is the most common infectious disease of humans and is also the most costly, for it is the leading cause of absenteeism from school and work.

lower respiratory tract may lead to a lipid pneumonia, particularly in the very young and the very old. A liberal intake of liquids, such as fruit juices, tea, or soft drinks, may be helpful. **There is no proof of any curative value from the many proprietary remedies containing vitamins (including vitamin C), bioflavinoids, multiple analgesics, or antihistaminics in the treatment of the common cold.** While the use of such remedies is of no benefit, the patient is exposed to agents with significant potential for engendering hypersensitivity. Throat lozenges without antimicrobics may help to relieve pharyngeal discomfort. If cough is nonproductive and is bothersome, a cough syrup such as elixir of terpin hydrate, with or without codeine, may be administered. In most cases, the acute symptoms usually last 1 to 2 days, and the patient is completely well in a week. If fever intervenes and symptoms persist, a careful physical examination must be carried out with particular attention given to auscultation of the lungs. A chest roentgenogram should be obtained because of the possibility of pneumonia.

THERAPY

There is no specific treatment for the common cold. Supportive measures are aimed at reducing the discomfort of the patient during the acute stage of the illness. Bacterial complications of significance are in-

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Chalmers TC: Effects of ascorbic acid on the common cold: An evaluation of the evidence. *Am J Med* 58:532, 1975

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Infectious Diseases

*A Modern Treatise
of Infectious Processes*

Paul D. Hoeprich, M.D.

*Professor of Medicine
Department of Internal Medicine
Section of Medical Mycology
Division of Infectious and Immunologic Diseases
University of California, Davis
School of Medicine
Sacramento, California*

M. Colin Jordan, M.D.

*Professor of Medicine and Microbiology
Department of Medicine
Division of Infectious Diseases
University of Minnesota
Hospitals and Clinics
Minneapolis, Minnesota*

with 141 contributors

J. B. Lippincott Company Philadelphia
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