Patient

View this article online at: patient.in/news-and-features/how-to-treat-covid-at-home

What are the options for COVID treatment at home?

Most people who are infected with COVID experience mild symptoms which can be treated at home. So if you've got the telltale signs of the virus, what should you do to feel better?

What are the COVID-19 symptoms?

COVID-19 symptoms include the following causes:

- **Fever** - a temperature above 37.8°C or skin which feels hot to touch.
- A new, continuous **cough**.
- A loss of, or change to, your sense of smell or taste.
- **Shortness of breath** and difficulty breathing.
- **Fatigue**.
- **Headaches**.
- **Sore throat**.
- Aches and pains.
- Runny nose.
- **Less common symptoms linked to the Pirola strain**.

How to avoid passing COVID-19 on to others

There is currently no legal requirement for you to test for COVID-19, but if you have tested positive for COVID-19, you should try to avoid contact with other people for five days after the day you took the test.

If you're under 18, you should avoid contact for three days after the test. For both children and adults, if you know someone who is more vulnerable to a serious COVID-19 infection - such as an older person or someone with a weakened immune system - wait 10 days after your test before contact.

Some people are eligible for free COVID-19 tests on the NHS. If you're not, you can still buy them in pharmacies.

In an emergency, call 999 or the relevant emergency number for your region. When describing your emergency, make sure to tell the handler that you have COVID-19.

Treating COVID-19 symptoms at home

As with other viruses such as colds and flu, taking it easy and looking after yourself are important to your recovery. You should try the following for COVID treatment at home:

- Drink plenty of fluids. **Drink enough water** so that your wee is a pale, clear colour and a good amount.
- Avoid alcohol as this will make you more dehydrated. There is also evidence that people with COVID-19 infection are prone to liver damage, which can be worsened by drinking alcohol.
- Stay home and get plenty of rest. Avoid any strenuous activity whilst you are unwell.
- Wash your hands with soap and water as often as possible. If you are in a shared space, it's your choice whether you wear a mask to prevent spreading.
- Use over-the-counter medicines to treat some of your symptoms, such as paracetamol.

COVID treatment at home medication

There is not currently a cure for COVID-19. The aim of COVID-19 treatment is to manage and reduce symptoms until you have recovered.

Most people have an asymptomatic or mild infection which can be treated at home. A proportion of people who contract COVID-19 will require hospital care - the likelihood of this is very low if you are young and otherwise healthy. Those at a higher risk of severe or critical infections include older people and those with underlying health conditions.

What over-the-counter medicine is good for COVID?

For most viral infections, including flu and the common cold, simple painkillers such as paracetamol and NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) such as ibuprofen - if you are able to have it - are widely recommended.

In the first wave of the pandemic, concerns were raised about a possible link between taking NSAIDs and developing more severe infection. In fact, this turned out to be completely untrue.

In 2020, the UK's Commission on Human Medicines drew up an urgent expert working group to look at the evidence. They found insufficient evidence to establish a link between use of ibuprofen, or other NSAIDs, and susceptibility to getting COVID-19 or the worsening of its symptoms[1].

The advice is to take paracetamol or ibuprofen when treating your symptoms of COVID-19 - such as fever and headache.

What about treating other COVID symptoms?

Some of the medications and treatments you might use to treat colds and flu will also help with COVID-19 treatment at home. Cough medicines or cough suppressants can help reduce your cough. Throat lozenges and remedies like honey and lemon may help soothe a sore throat.

What not to take when you have COVID?

If you have antibiotics at home, do not take them for COVID-19 treatment. As it is a virus, antibiotics will not treat the symptoms of coronavirus.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) warns that not only are antibiotics uneffective for COVID-19, you should never take antibiotics which haven't been prescribed for a certain condition because each time you do you contribute toward antimicrobial resistance[2].

Antibacterial hand washes - unless they're also labelled as antiviral - cleaning products and hand sanitisers also won't necessarily be effective in killing the virus on surfaces or your hands for the same reasons.

Hand sanitisers containing at least 60% alcohol, or most with at least 300 parts per million of hypochlorous acid, are effective at killing viruses and improving COVID-19 treatment at home - these are almost always labelled as antiviral.

Natural home remedies for COVID

There are many natural and herbal remedy ideas floating around the internet and in health shops. Currently, there is not a remedy to cure COVID-19, so don't be fooled by the miracle COVID-19 treatments some people are trying to sell.

This said, vitamins, food supplements, and herbs have many proven health benefits. Here we investigate which home remedies for COVID might work, which don't, and which may be harmful to try.

When to seek medical attention

If your illness is worsening, your symptoms aren't improving or you're worried, you can contact NHS 111 online, call the NHS non-emergency number 111, or book an urgent GP appointment. If there is an emergency and you need an ambulance, call 999 and tell the call handler that you have coronavirus.

With children it can be harder to tell when to seek more help. If your child's symptoms are getting worse, if they have a high temperature or other signs of illness such as a loss of appetite, a rash, or feeling weak, it's a good idea to seek medical attention as COVID treatment at home may not be enough.

Further reading

1. GOV.UK: Commission on human medicines advice on ibuprofen and coronavirus.

2. CDC: COVID-19 and antimicrobial resistance.

Commission on Human Medicines advice on ibuprofen and coronavirus (COVID-19)

Disclaimer: This article is for information only and should not be used for the diagnosis or treatment of medical conditions. Egton Medical Information Systems Limited has used all reasonable care in compiling the information but makes no warranty as to its accuracy. Consult a doctor or other healthcare professional for diagnosis and treatment of medical conditions. For details see our conditions.

Authored by:	Peer Reviewed by: Dr Krishna Vakharia, MRCGP	
Originally Published: 20/11/2023	Next review date: 16/10/2023	Document ID: doc_31303

View this article online at: patient.in/news-and-features/how-to-treat-covid-at-home

Discuss What are the options for COVID treatment at home? and find more trusted resources at Patient.