

Your Health Reference Sheet

Topic: Influenza (Flu)

By Carol Ritberger, PhD, Medical Intuitive

While the word flu (influenza) is often applied to almost anything that makes us feel unwell and produces fever, chills, and aches and pains, it shouldn't be mistaken for the common cold or other airborne viruses. This is because the flu differs significantly from a cold, both in its rapid onset and in its potentially life-threatening complications, which can develop quickly, especially in children and the elderly. The word flu is derived from the French word *influentia*, which refers to the belief that epidemics were caused by the influence of the stars. And, while medicine may not agree with the stars influencing it, the flu certainly lives up to its epidemic reputation because this acute, respiratory infection is capable of spreading at lightning speed and infecting millions of people within a matter of months. As many as 69,000 Americans have died from influenza in a bad epidemic year.

Because the flu is a virus, antibiotics are not effective in treating it, even though they may be prescribed. The most common treatment is bed rest, plenty of fluids, and aspirin or ibuprofen to relieve the fever and discomfort. The problem with the conventional medical treatment is that it doesn't provide the immediate eradication of the flu miseries. Consequently, if you get the flu, you can expect to experience its miserable symptoms until it runs through its normal seven- to ten-day cycle. However, fortunately, there are alternative therapeutic choices that can shorten the duration and the severity, and even help in avoiding flu-related complications.

General Description

Influenza, or flu, is an acute, respiratory infection that's spread via airborne-infected respiratory droplets through the process of coughing and sneezing and from the residue on handkerchiefs and Kleenex. The seasonal flu associated with a respiratory infection almost never causes gastrointestinal symptoms and shouldn't be confused with the stomach flu, which is characterized by vomiting, nausea, and diarrhea. However, the H1N1 strain can produce symptoms such as vomiting, nausea, and diarrhea, as well as respiratory infection. The flu is diagnosed primarily by the symptoms of the individual and the community. Rarely is laboratory testing performed in the diagnosis of the flu.

Flu viruses are categorized into three classifications: A, B, and C. Type A mutations are the most prevalent and are responsible for the major epidemics that occur every several years. Type B is milder and is usually not associated with epidemics. But, type B has been linked to the development of Reye's syndrome, a potentially fatal complication of viral