

Help the Aged produces a range of free advice leaflets for older people.

Financial Leaflets

- Can You Claim It?
- Check Your Tax
- Claiming Disability Benefits
- Managing A Lump Sum
- Questions on Pensions
- Thinking About Money

Housing and Home Safety Leaflets

- Fire
- Housing Matters
- Keep Out the Cold
- Living Alone Safely
- Residential Care
- Safety in Your Home
- Security in Your Home

Health Leaflets

- Bereavement
- Better Hearing
- Better Sight
- Fight the Flu
- Fitter Feet
- Healthy Bones
- Healthy Eating
- Incontinence
- Keeping Mobile
- Managing Your Medicines
- Shingles

For copies of any of these leaflets, please write to the **Information Department**.

You can also contact Help the Aged for information about:

- SeniorLine – Help the Aged's advice and information service on 0808 800 6565
- SeniorLink – Immediate telephone response service – call 01483-729678
- Gifted Housing – donation of your home in return for life-long care
- Will Information Pack – information relating to making or changing your will
- Insurance – contact Help the Aged Insurance Services on 0800 41 31 80
- Care Fees Advisory Services – immediate financial solutions to help people find the best way of paying for care – call 0500 76 74 76

Help the Aged

St James's Walk
Clerkenwell Green
London EC1R 0BE
Telephone: 020-7253 0253
Website: www.helptheaged.org.uk

Help the Aged

SeniorLine is a free national information service run by Help the Aged for older people, their relatives, carers and friends.

Telephone: **0808 800 6565** Textphone (Minicom): **0800 26 96 26**
9am to 4pm, Monday to Friday. Your call will be free of charge

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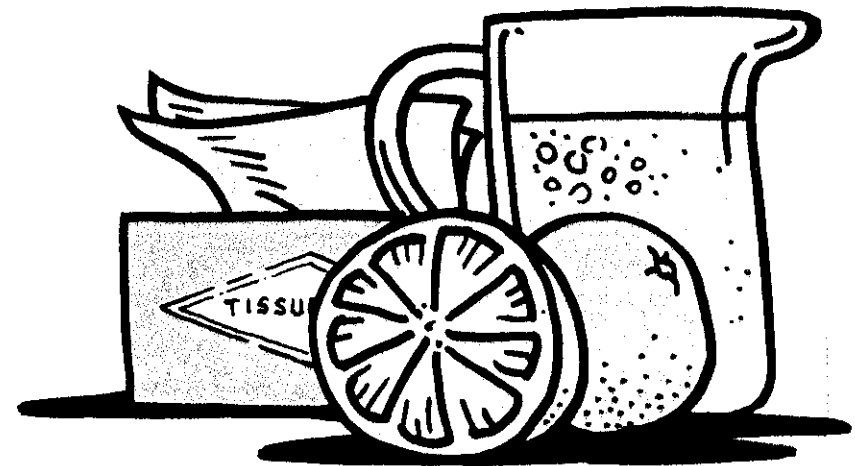
Summer 2000



Help the Aged

Fight the Flu

A Help the Aged advice leaflet on influenza



2000 - 2001 edition

A flu vaccination is now recommended for all aged 65 and over

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Flu – an unwelcome winter visitor

Winter brings dark evenings, cold weather and frozen pipes! It is also a time when we suffer more coughs and colds and there is the reappearance of another seasonal visitor, the unpleasant and much more serious illness, **influenza** or **flu**.

An age-old illness

Flu is not new; it has been around for thousands of years. The worst outbreak in recent history was the epidemic of 1918-1919, when over 150,000 people died. More recently, we have had the “Asian” (1957), “Hong Kong” (1968) and “Red” (1977) flu to contend with. It is estimated that even in non-epidemic years, up to 4,000 people die from flu-related illnesses, and some years it is many more than this.

What is flu?

Flu is a virus which first attacks the cells in the respiratory tract. Whilst it can be caught at any time of the year, the most common time is between December and March. Unlike other common viruses such as chickenpox or measles, there is not just one type of flu virus but several different types. These types themselves change frequently. So getting flu once does not provide protection against a future attack by a different type or a variation of the same type.

How is flu spread?

Flu is spread through the droplets released into the air when a sufferer sneezes or coughs. The virus may be caught from breathing in these droplets or by having contact with surfaces where they have settled. Someone who has flu is usually infectious for about a week.

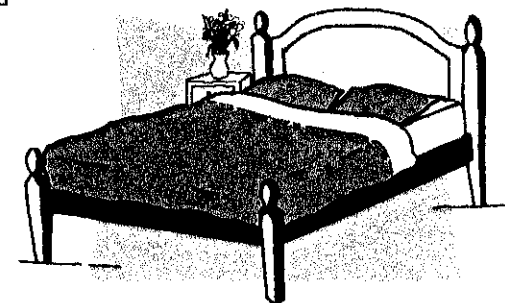
What are the symptoms of flu?

The typical symptoms of flu are a high temperature (103°F or 39.4°C) with chills, a cough, sore throat, weakness and aching muscles in the back, arms or legs and often a headache made worse by moving the eyes.

The major difference between flu and the common cold is that you may be literally “knocked flat” by flu and unable to do anything but go to bed until the worst of the illness has passed.

The main symptoms of flu generally last for about seven days. For some people, however, complications such as bronchitis and pneumonia will delay recovery.

Once the severe illness has passed, many people complain that they feel tired and unwell. This may last for several weeks.



Who is at risk from flu?

Anyone can get flu. Most people overcome the illness after a recovery period, but older people and people who are not well to begin with are more prone to serious complications that can follow a bout of flu.

Those who are considered to be at a “**high risk**” from flu include:

- people aged 65 and over
- people with lung disease such as bronchitis, asthma and emphysema
- people with heart disease

- people with kidney disease
- people with diabetes
- people whose immune system is weakened by disease or treatment
- residents of residential/nursing homes or other long-stay accommodation

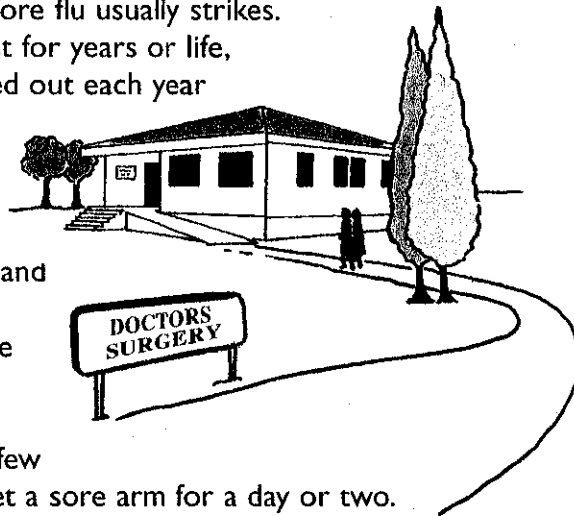
The Department of Health recommends that everyone included in these “high risk” groups should have a flu vaccination every year.

Prevention is better than cure

Flu can largely be prevented by vaccination. Vaccines are available every year from October, before flu usually strikes.

Unlike some vaccines that last for years or life, flu vaccination must be carried out each year to protect against flu.

The flu vaccine prevents the illness in about three quarters of those vaccinated and there is evidence that those who do catch flu have it more mildly and with fewer complications. Modern flu vaccines are associated with few side effects – some people get a sore arm for a day or two.



Whilst anyone can ask their doctor for a flu vaccination, the Department of Health specifically recommends vaccination of those people who are in a “high risk” group. If you are 65 or over or think you may fall into one of the other “high risk” categories, discuss flu vaccination with your doctor or practice nurse.

Flu vaccine for people over 65 years of age

Complications, such as pneumonia or severe bronchitis, can follow a bout of flu. The risk of experiencing these complications increases with age. This is why flu vaccination is now recommended for people aged 65 and over. If you are aged 65 plus, talk to your doctor or practice nurse about vaccination.

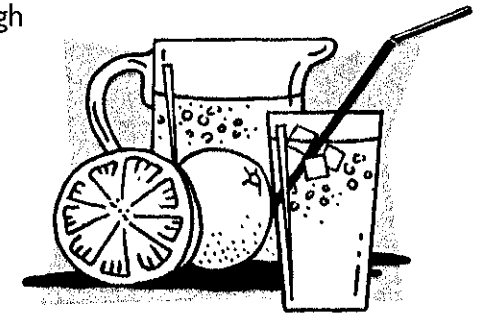
Flu in residential and nursing homes

Elderly people living in residential or nursing homes are at greater risk because of the ease and speed at which the flu virus can spread through homes where many “high risk” residents live together. For this reason, the Department of Health recommends vaccination of residents of residential and nursing homes.

What if you catch flu?

Antibiotics are of no use in treating flu. However, they may be used to treat ear or chest infections, which can develop as a result of flu. To treat the symptoms of flu, you may find the following tips helpful.

- **Stay in bed** – rest as much as you can. This helps your body to fight the infection.
- **Drink plenty of fluids.** You need to replace the liquid you lose through sweating.
- **Avoid alcohol** – this makes you more dehydrated.
- **Aspirin, paracetamol or anti-inflammatory drugs** such as ibuprofen can relieve headaches, muscle pains and fever.



- **Cough medicines and decongestants** could be helpful. If you are already taking other medications, whether prescribed or bought over the counter, always seek the advice of your pharmacist.
- If you feel very hot and feverish, **sponging down with tepid water** can reduce body temperature.

If you are in one of the **“high risk” groups** you should **always let your GP know** if you think you may have flu. You should also consult your doctor if you are concerned about your condition, if your symptoms do not improve in a week or if you experience:

- Chest pain or
- Severe earache or
- Wheezing or breathlessness

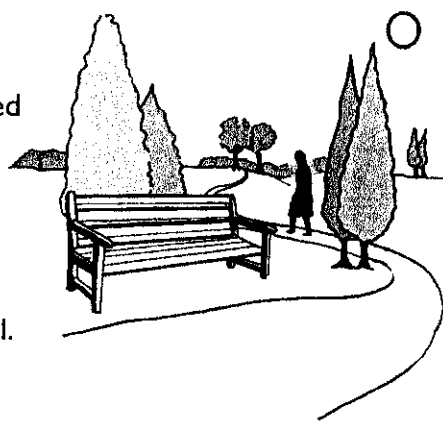
If you are not sure whether to contact your doctor, you can call **NHS Direct** on 0845 46 47 to ask their advice.

It is a good idea to tell your friends or neighbours that you are feeling unwell so that they can check that you are OK and give you any help you need.

Recovering from flu

After a bout of flu, many people feel tired or under the weather for several weeks. If you feel like this, these simple measures may help to speed your recovery.

- Try to give up smoking while you feel ill. If you do give up smoking during the illness, try not to start again.



- Try not to have late nights.
- Try not to have too much alcohol.
- Whilst you may not feel up to vigorous exercise, try taking a daily walk.
- Eat a variety of nourishing foods and ensure that you drink plenty of liquid. If your appetite is poor, meal replacement drinks and milky drinks can provide a nutritious alternative. For ideas on how to eat a balanced nutritious diet, see Help the Aged's free advice leaflet "Healthy Eating".

If your symptoms persist and you don't start feeling better soon, see your doctor.

Remember prevention is better than cure. If you are aged 65 or over, or think you maybe in one of the other “high risk” groups, talk to your doctor or practice nurse about vaccination.

Keep healthy during the winter

A healthy diet gives you energy, and helps to protect you against illness during the winter months. Try to take some regular exercise if you can - any kind of activity that gets the circulation going and helps you keep warm. If you smoke, think about giving up. For more information on diet and exercise, see Help the Aged's free advice leaflets "Healthy Eating" and "Keeping Mobile".

It is also vitally important that your home is kept warm during the cold weather – living in a cold home can be a risk to your health. Help the Aged's free advice leaflet "Keep Out The Cold" gives information and advice on insulation and draughtproofing, making the most of your heating and dealing with bills.