

Ahhh...ahhh...ahhhchoo!

by Cheryl Powell Knight-Ridder Tribune

Sniff, sniff. Cough, cough. Snort. Snort. Ugh!

Those all-too-familiar sounds of cold sufferers are far from music to your (stuffy) ears.

Like it or not, cold season is upon us. Despite all the amazing advances of modern medicine, the cure for the common cold remains a mystery.

There's no shot, pill or magical herb that can completely protect people from respiratory viruses, either.

There are, however, some things people can do to cut down their risk of getting sick, as well as feel better quicker when they do catch a cold.

Got questions? Here are some answers, provided by medical experts:

Q: What exactly is a cold, anyway?

A: The common cold is a viral infection of the lining of the nose, sinuses, throat and airways.

An estimated 150 viruses can cause a cold.

The first symptoms of a cold nose or throat discomfort usually start within one to three days after infection.

Then the real misery begins. Sneezing. Runny nose. Cough. Thick, yellowish-green mucus.

Most colds last about 10 days, though symptoms have been known to linger for as long as three weeks during recent cold seasons, said Dr. Andu Mader, director of diagnostic referral services in the Department of Pediatrics at Mercy Medical Center in Canton, Ohio.

Q: How are colds spread?

A: The viruses that cause the common cold are spread through contact with the secretions from an infected person.

"Most of the times, when you get a cold it's when you touch someone else," said Dr. James Tan, chairman of the Department of Medicine for Summa Health System in Akron, Ohio.

Hand-washing is the best prevention, Tan said. When soap and water isn't available, alcohol-based hand sanitizers also are effective, studies have shown.

Q: Are a cold and the flu the same?

A: They're both caused by viruses, but they have different symptoms.

Influenza, more commonly known as the flu, tends to have symptoms that hit people hard and fast.

People with the flu get fevers as high as 103 degrees.

Other flu symptoms include headaches,

muscle aches, cough, respiratory symptoms and tender lymph nodes.

Q: Why can't I take an antibiotic to cure my cold?

A: Antibiotics treat only infections caused by bacteria, not viruses.

Improper overuse of antibiotics can lead to antibiotic resistance. Then when someone really gets a bacteria infection, the antibiotics won't work.

Q: So, what can I do to feel better?

A: For starters, get plenty of rest and



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Ohio U. student Jason Rumpel, like many others this time of year, nurses a cold.

drink at least six to eight glasses of water a day.

"Time will do things for the common cold," Mader said.

Numerous over-the-counter medications can help ease the most common symptoms.

To counter runny noses and congestion, antihistamines, such as Benedryl, can help by drying up the crud.

These products can cause drowsiness, so use them with caution, said Tim Brown, a pharmacologist with Akron (Ohio) General Medical Center and West Side Family Practice. Prescription antihistamines don't cause as much drowsiness, Brown said, but they also tend not to work as well.

Decongestants, such as Sudafed, also help with congestion. But people with irregular heart rhythms, uncontrolled high blood pressure or past history of stroke or heart attack need to check with their doctor before taking these drugs, which speed up the heart rate, Brown said.

Nose sprays or nose drops, such as Afrin, also are helpful for short-term use, Brown said. Using them for more than three or four days, however, can cause even more congestion after people quit using them.

For aches and pains, people can use aspirin, acetaminophen, ibuprofen or the newer nonsteroidal anti-inflammatories, or NSAIDs.

The NSAIDs have an added benefit. "It can also stop your cough, and we didn't know that," Tan said.

People with ulcers should check with their doctors to see what's OK to take. Don't give children with a fever aspirin, this avoids the risk of developing Reye's syndrome.

Cool-mist humidifiers that moisten the air and allow the nose to stay moist also can ease cold symptoms and coughs.

Q: Are there any natural remedies that can reduce the chances of getting a cold or ease symptoms once someone gets a cold?

A: The mainstream medical community remains skeptical about the effectiveness of alternative treatments. Some alternative therapies, do have scientific studies to back up their claims.

Echinacea has been shown in some clinical trials to shorten a cold, Brown said. "It probably needs to be taken within the first 24 to 48 hours within feeling the symptoms of the common cold," he said.

Zinc lozenges and nasal sprays also have been shown in some studies to decrease the symptoms and duration of a cold, but those results are questionable, Brown said. Like echinacea, zinc must be taken as soon as people suspect they have a cold.

Q: Can a cold turn into a bacterial infection?

A: Lingering cold symptoms can increase a person's susceptibility to contracting a bacterial infection in the middle ear, sinuses or lungs.

When someone has a cold, the normal drainage is blocked because the mucus membranes are swollen, Tan said.

"That means it's stagnant, and bacteria can tend to grow," he said.

These bacterial infections tend to develop after seven days. Unlike a cold, they require an antibiotic to clear up.

Q: When should someone see a doctor for cold symptoms?

A: If a cold lasts longer than 10 days, most experts agree it's time to call a doctor.

Children's Hospital Medical Center of Akron recommends contacting a doctor if any of these symptoms develop:

- Pus-like drainage from the nose.
- A red throat.
- Hoarseness that remains when other symptoms are gone.
- Prolonged coughing, wheezing or labored breathing.
- Significant behavior changes, such as irritability or lethargy.

Through the looking glass

by Mike Pingree, KRT Campus

I THINK I'VE MADE MY POINT

A 24-year-old woman was trying to get some sleep in her Bluffton, S.C., home, but her boyfriend was watching TV in another room and refused to turn down the volume. After a spirited discussion brought no resolution to the matter, she stabbed him. She was arrested.

IT'S OK, YOU'RE SAFE NOW

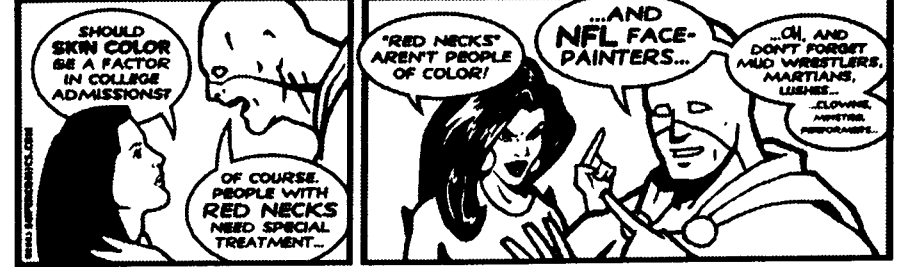
A man drove through a roadblock in Marseilles, France, and was arrested after a brief high-speed pursuit. He explained to police that he had been driving recklessly because he was being "chased by Martians." Psychiatrists have been notified.

NO, IT WASN'T US, HONEST

After lightning burned down three houses in Limpopo, South Africa, angry villagers concluded that the bolts from the blue were directed by two old men practicing witchcraft. The men emphatically denied this, but the mob drove them from their homes anyway.

CAPTAIN RIBMAN - Color Commentary

by Sprengelmeyer & Davis



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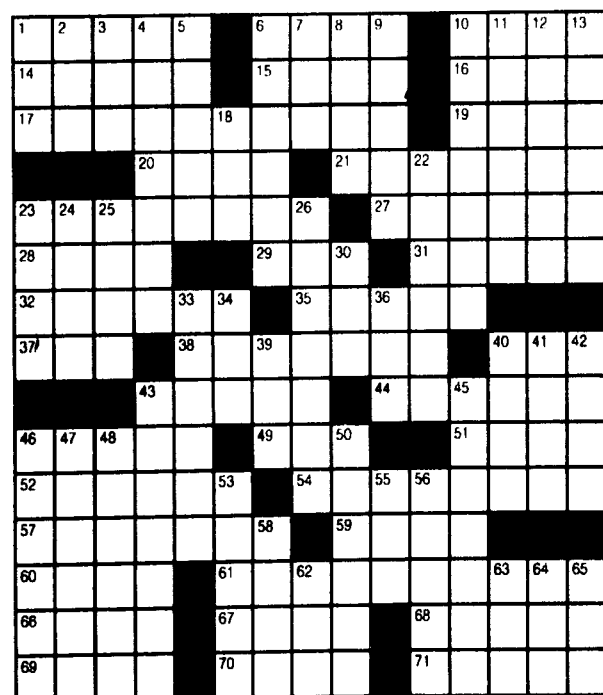


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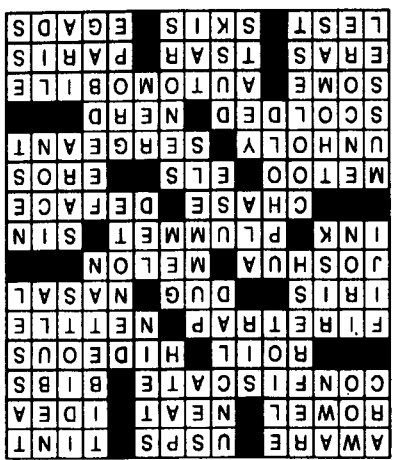
Crossword

- ACROSS
1 Cognizant
6 Letter-carriers' org.
10 Hue
14 Spur wheel
15 Tidy
16 Conception
17 Appropriate
19 Tops of overalls
20 Make muddy
21 Shockingly ugly
23 Conflagration candidate
27 Irritate
28 Eye part
29 Excavated
31 Twangy
32 Book before Judges
35 Casaba, e.g.
37 Pen fill
38 Plunge rapidly
40 Commit an immoral act
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44 Spoil the appearance of
46 I want to also
49 Golfer Ernie
51 God of love
52 Immoral
54 York's rank
57 Chided
59 Dweeb
60 Unspecified amount
61 Motorcar
66 Significant periods
67 Russian sovereign
68 Helen's abductor
69 For fear that
70 Schusses
71 Old oath



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Solutions



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1 Circle segment
2 Court
3 Arista
4 Reinvgorate
5 "Middlemarch" author
6 Naked
7 Salton or Caspian
8 Trodden way
9 Beer mug

- 10 Dalai Lama's language
11 Dunderheads
12 Extensive interstellar mass
13 Dangling ornament
18 Address for an officer
22 Mean
23 Vijay Singh's homeland
24 Press
25 Danger
26 Thrashes with the fists
30 Precious stone
33 Support
34 In the style of
36 Guided
39 Exploit
40 Poet Teasdale
41 PC symbol
42 Snug retreat
43 Superlatively nifty
45 Dobbins' lunch pail?
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- 47 Additional performance
48 Noted doubter
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53 "The Winding Stair" poet
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Remember: College is good

by John Gallagher Knight-Ridder Tribune

John Bommarito used to think he didn't need a college degree to move up in his field. A music industry entrepreneur, Bommarito, a 35-year-old Livonia, Mich., resident, has been a music buyer, a store manager and a disc jockey at clubs and small radio stations. But the music turned sour when he tried to find a higher management job without a bachelor's degree. "I figured, well, I've got 15 years of solid work history, I've been a head buyer, I've run my own company, I should be able to find a job," he said.

But he searched frustratingly for six months, getting no offers except for jobs in record stores as a glorified stock clerk.

Instead of raging against the system, he realized that going back to school for a degree "was the only thing I could do."

Nothing comes closer as a means to increase lifetime earnings than getting more education. Economists agree that the case for more education is overwhelming.

College graduates older than 25 earn more than twice as much each week as high school drop-outs, \$896 vs. \$360, nearly twice as much as those who stopped with a high school diploma, \$506 a week, and comfortably more than those with some college but no degree, \$598 a week, all according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Moreover, college graduates have experienced growth in inflation-adjusted earnings since 1979. In contrast, high school dropouts have seen their real earnings decline.

Michael Connors, a building rehabilitation specialist with Macomb County, Mich., government, will finish his bachelor's degree in business communication within the year. He might stay with the county or look elsewhere. But, either way, he expects his degree to pay off.

"Financially, it'll open up an opportunity to obtain a better job with better pay," said Connors, 27, of St. Clair Shores, Mich. "It's

a tool that enables you to open other doors."

And pay isn't all of it, either. Want greater job stability? High school dropouts are suffering nearly 9 percent unemployment right now; for college graduates, the figure is just slightly over 3 percent.

Alison Wolf, a British writer and author of a new book "Does Education Matter?" puts it neatly: "Pick a highly educated and a poorly educated person at random and you can almost guarantee that the first will be earning more than the second."

She added, "The more educated you are, the more likely you are to enjoy stable, long-term employment."

Bommarito attends classes at University of Michigan-Deerborn, studying toward a business degree.

He jokes about standing out as "the old guy with the little balding patch and the gray hair and the beard." But he also realizes that his degree will be able to get him what he wants.

"Earnings is somewhat important, but more important to me is going to a company that I'm going to enjoy working for," he said, "coming home from work and telling my wife, 'I had a good day today.' I'd like to be able to say that once.

"I haven't been able to say that in so long."

So bountiful are the lifetime benefits of more education that they're worth going to some trouble to get.

But it's not easy. Keep in mind that midcareer workers who go back to school often need to juggle children and classwork, as well as come up with tuition and fees that could run into tens of thousands of dollars.

Frank Floyd, a machine tool designer in Shelby Township, Mich., grew up in Alabama and got mainly technical training in the Navy and, later, on the job. Now 40, Floyd is going back to school at Oakland Community College for an associate's degree while holding down a full-time job.

With hopes of getting a bachelor's degree next, he figures he's looking at 10 years of school and work.

"It's quite challenging, to say the least," Floyd said. "It isn't always convenient. It's just something to be committed to and do it."

Few experts doubt that the trouble is worth it.

"In the long run, if you want to have higher income, you've got to get more education," said Ed Lotterman, a St. Paul, Minn.-based economist and writer. "It's hard to do in the short term, but the deck is just stacked against you if you don't have more than a high school degree."

Education isn't free, of course, and it can help to calculate how long it will take to earn back what you've spent on tuition and fees. That's especially important if you're quitting your job to go back to school full time.

Say you're a secretary earning \$25,000 a year. Assume you quit that job for two years to finish a bachelor's degree you had started but never completed. Assume tuition and fees run \$10,000 a year. Your lost income plus out-of-pocket expenses will total \$70,000 by the time you get your degree.

If you then get a better job paying, say, \$40,000 a year, it will still take you nearly two years just to break even on your investment.

Payback periods that stretch to several years might call for a reappraisal of a plan. But it usually shouldn't mean scrapping the plan altogether.

A couple of caveats: Not every education plan is right for everyone. If you don't enjoy computers, taking a class in programming won't be for you. If you don't like children, it makes little sense to get a teaching degree. The moral: Think seriously about what you want to do.

Beware of educational scams that promise you an easy road to your degree. Be particularly wary of ones that show up in your e-mail file unbidden. If it sounds too good to be true, it is.