Treating Cough, Cold and Flu Symptoms
After Bariatric Surgery
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People who have bariatric surgery are not allowed to take certain medications because of the changes to their stomach and intestines. That does not mean they have to suffer through coughs, colds and the flu; there are lots of over-the-counter options that are still available to bariatric patients.

While it is important to avoid medications that contain NSAIDs such as ibuprofen, naproxen or aspirin (common brand names are Motrin®, Aleve®, Alka-seltzer® and Pepto-bismol®), medications that contain acetaminophen (Tylenol®) and other medications used to treat cold and flu symptoms are safe alternatives.

Over-the-counter (OTC) products are sold in local pharmacies and grocery stores and are available for purchase without a prescription. If you are ever unsure, or need help selecting an OTC product, ask the pharmacist for assistance and be sure to let them know you can’t take NSAIDs or extended-release products (gastric bypass patients).

Medications that are generally safe to take can be selected based on your symptoms. Remember, these medications are only safe if you do not have other conditions (such as high blood pressure) that would prevent you from taking them.

**Medications to treat nasal congestion:**
- Diphenhydramine (Benadryl®)
- Phenylephrine (Sudafed PE®)
- Pseudoephedrine (Sudafed®)
- Nasal sprays and irrigations (Ocean Nasal Spray®)

**Medications to treat cough:**
- Dextromethorphan (Vicks 44 Dry Cough®)
- Guaifenesin (Robitussin®)

**Medications to treat fever/aches and pains:**
- Acetaminophen (Tylenol®)

**Medications to treat sore throat:**
- Lozenges (Halls®, Cepacol®)
- Sore throat sprays (Chloraseptic®)
Combination products:

- Sudafed Cold and Sinus® (contains acetaminophen and pseudoephedrine)
- Theraflu Severe Cold and Congestion® (contains acetaminophen, dextromethorphan and pseudoephedrine)
- Robitussin DM® (contains guaifenesin and dextromethorphan)
- NyQuil® Cold and Flu Relief (contains acetaminophen, dextromethorphan and doxylamine)

When choosing an OTC product, there are many factors to consider. Tablets and liquids (like Mucinex® and Delsym®) that are taken once or twice a day are more likely to be extended-release products that will not be as effective for gastric bypass patients, but certainly appropriate for adjustable gastric band and sleeve gastrectomy patients. Some products contain lots of sugar, which can cause nausea, pain, sweating and diarrhea (referred to as “dumping syndrome”) in patients who have had gastric bypass surgery.

Whenever possible, choose products made with little or no sugar (sucrose, fructose, lactose, sorbitol), the label should say “sugar-free” or “SF”. If a sugar-free product is not available, remember that ingredients are listed by decreasing amount. If sugar is listed later, there is less of it in the product. Try to choose a product that is only going to treat the symptoms you are having. Combination products with extra ingredients may cost more and won’t provide additional benefit.

Knowing the medications you CAN take is as important as knowing the medications you CAN’T take. Read labels and look for ingredients you know you can use. Over time, you will figure out what works best for you.

References: