

How Antiviral Medications Can Help Older Adults with the Flu

Older adults are at a higher risk for serious illness from the flu.

Older adults are at higher risk for serious complications because our immune systems weaken with age. Older adults are also more likely to have chronic diseases that make them more susceptible to complications from infectious diseases, like the flu, RSV, COVID-19, and more.

Adults over 65 are more likely to experience severe complications from the flu, such as:

- Pneumonia
- Worsening of chronic conditions (e.g., asthma, diabetes, heart disease)
- Serious complications like heart attack
- Hospitalization or even death



Antiviral treatment can help prevent severe illness from influenza (flu).

Because the flu is caused by a virus, antibiotics don't help treat the illness since they fight bacterial infections. But there are medications that can help prevent severe illness and complications, shorten the length of the illness, and make symptoms less severe. These flu antivirals are prescription medications that fight influenza by slowing the multiplying and spreading of the virus within the body.

Antivirals need to be prescribed and started quickly – within 2 days after symptoms first appear because they work best when taken within **48 hours after symptoms begin**. Anyone who thinks they might have the flu should act quickly and call their healthcare provider.

Common Flu Antivirals

1. **Oseltamivir (Tamiflu)** – Available as a pill or liquid, usually taken for 5 days.
2. **Zanamivir (Relenza)** – Inhaled powder, not suitable for those with breathing problems.
3. **Baloxavir (Xofluza)** – A single-dose pill.
4. **Peramivir (Rapivab)** – Given as an IV for severe cases.

ANTIVIRALS CAN HELP IN MULTIPLE WAYS



Reduce Symptom Severity

Shorten the time you feel sick.



Lower Complications

Decrease the risk of hospitalization and severe outcomes.



Prevention

In some cases, antivirals can be prescribed before infection to help prevent the flu after exposure to someone who is sick.

Antivirals are safe.

Flu antivirals are generally safe for older adults. However, in some cases, people may experience mild side effects that can include:

- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Dizziness
- Allergic reactions (rare, occurring in about 1-2 out of every million doses administered)

Medical history should be discussed before an antiviral is prescribed to help avoid interactions.



What should older adults do if they get the flu?



Call Their Health Care Provider Immediately

Discuss symptoms and whether antivirals are right, as they must be started within 48 hours of getting sick.



Rest and Stay Hydrated

Help the body recover.



Watch for Warning Signs

Seek emergency care if you or a loved one experience:

- Difficulty breathing
- Chest pain
- Severe weakness or confusion

PREVENTION TIPS



Get Vaccinated: A flu shot is the best protection.



Wash Hands Frequently: Prevent the spread of germs.



Avoid Crowds: Especially during flu season.



Stay Healthy: Eat well, stay active, and manage chronic conditions.

Stay informed and act quickly to protect yourself and your loved ones during flu season.

For personalized advice, consult your healthcare provider.



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