

## Managing Mild Upper Respiratory Tract Infections: How to Choose a Treatment that Suits Your Patient

As we have seen in parts 1 and 2 of this series based on a recent position paper<sup>1</sup>, mild upper respiratory tract infections (MURTI) can impose significant challenges on individuals. This final article explores the nuanced approach required to support patients with pre-existing conditions. Navigating these situations with empathy, expertise, and a patient-centred mindset is essential, and pharmacists are encouraged to consider individual patient preferences when formulating treatment plans.

This time, let us take Maria as an example. Maria advocates alternative health approaches but has become extremely cautious and afraid of getting sick since the pandemic. She is a high-risk respiratory patient due to her age and pre-existing sleep apnoea. Nasal congestion from a respiratory infection has aggravated her breathing issues and left her feeling anxious, fatigued, and desperate for relief.

**Offer solutions and provide reassurance:** Although the common cold causes similar symptoms, influenza and COVID-19 are more likely to lead to complications such as pneumonia and organ failure. Those at highest risk include young children, older adults, and immunocompromised patients.<sup>2</sup> Sleep disorders can further negatively impact immune function.<sup>3</sup> Given her medical history, Maria could be offered at-home testing to rule out COVID-19 or influenza.<sup>4</sup> These tests help pharmacists make tailored recommendations, such as monitoring oxygen saturation at home using a pulse oximeter, which improves patient

safety in complicated URTI cases.<sup>1,5</sup>

**Symptomatic relief and the importance of sleep:** Sleep disorders are common, and can be exacerbated by respiratory infections due to nasal obstruction and coughing. Sleep disruption resulting from nasal obstruction has been linked to increased fatigue the next day. Sleep is crucial for good immune function and general health; hence, treating sleep disorders and improving sleep quality should be a priority in holistic MURTI treatment approaches.<sup>1,6,7</sup> Decongestant medications may help alleviate cold-induced sleep disruption.<sup>1,8,9</sup>

***“Lack of sleep and poor sleep quality lead to increased fatigue and stress, and increased susceptibility to mild upper respiratory tract infections and illnesses. Reducing the symptoms of these illnesses then benefits wellbeing, reduces stress and fatigue, and improves sleep quality.”***

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**Treatment goals:** As there are no cures for MURTI, treatment aims primarily to reduce symptom duration and severity.<sup>10</sup> Relieving nasal congestion for example is key to breathing freely and avoiding complications such as sinusitis, otitis media and the onset or worsening of mild to severe sleep disturbances, including obstructive sleep apnoea.<sup>11</sup> Further treatment goals include helping the immune system fight off the infection and preventing the spread of disease to others.<sup>12,13,14</sup>

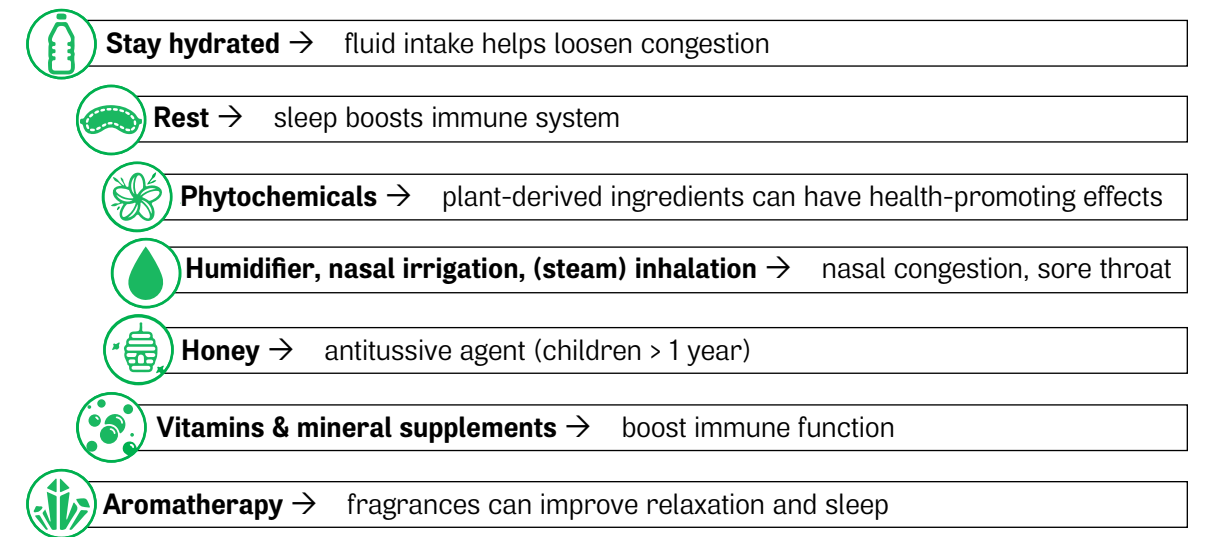
Maria, 61 years  
alternative medicine  
enthusiast



**Maria is very tired. A stuffy nose has aggravated her sleep apnoea. She is anxious and**

- worries that her respiratory infection could lead to complications because of her underlying condition
- wants to feel better so she can have a good night's sleep

Figure 1: Lifestyle choices, herbal and traditional remedies that may also help alleviate MURTI symptoms<sup>19-28</sup>



**Holistic approach to wellbeing:** Recognising the interconnectedness of physical symptoms, emotional wellbeing, and sleep quality is vital. By taking a holistic approach, health professionals can focus on each patient's preferences and needs. This encourages compliance, increases security, and reduces psychosocial stress and chronic disease.<sup>1,15</sup> Stress may worsen or prolong MURTI symptoms; hence, stress reduction techniques can complement pharmacological interventions and aid recovery.<sup>1,16</sup>

***“A holistic approach to wellbeing involves consideration of both positive outcomes, such as happiness and life satisfaction, and negative ones such as stress, fatigue, anxiety, and depression. Negative factors which decrease wellbeing, such as exposure to stressors, and positive ones which enhance it, such as social support, must also be considered.”***

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**Conclusion:** Maria's case highlights the importance of a comprehensive assessment. Managing MURTI requires a multifaceted approach, balancing symptomatic relief with consideration for individual preferences. Pharmacists are pivotal in guiding patients like Maria through this process, offering personalised support and evidence-based recommendations. By prioritising patient wellbeing and fostering collaborative care, pharmacists can significantly impact the health outcomes of individuals with MURTI.

### Did you know that ?

- Longer sleep reduces the risk of catching a cold<sup>17,18</sup>
- Allievement of sleep-disrupting symptoms is likely important for a faster recovery<sup>18</sup>
- Resting and staying hydrated can hasten recovery from MURTI<sup>19</sup>

A holistic approach aims to provide rapid symptomatic relief and is considered beneficial for patient wellbeing, stress reduction, and sleep quality<sup>1</sup>. This may include promoting healthy lifestyle choices, home remedies, and herbal preparations (see Figure 1).



**Relief beyond symptoms:** Watch this video to learn more about enhancing wellbeing in upper respiratory illnesses.



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