

How to Stop Cold Sores Dead in Their Tracks

by [KRISTIN HOWARD](#) | UPDATED 01/03/20



They aren't dangerous by any means, but anyone who struggles with cold sores would probably agree that they're a nuisance they would rather do without. Often lasting anywhere from a few days to a few weeks, cold sores commonly show up on the lips, chin, and nostrils, and are usually a little tough to hide. Fortunately, the appearance of cold sores can be reduced—or the outbreak can be halted entirely by taking a few measures as soon as you feel one coming on. Whether you opt for natural preventatives or prescribed antiviral medication, living with cold sores doesn't have to be a source of stress.

Below, two skincare experts explain what cold sores are, why they appear, and how to get rid of them ASAP, if not prevent them from showing up altogether.

MEET THE EXPERT

- Dr. Gary Goldenberg is a medical and cosmetic dermatologist, as well as the founder of Goldenberg Dermatology in New York City.
- Sarah Brown is a sensitive skin expert and the founder of the cult-favorite, organic beauty line Pai Skincare.

01 Add Lysine to Your Diet

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Keeping your immune system as healthy as possible will go a long way in the health of your skin and body, especially if you're living the virus that leads to cold sores. Fortunately, there are several things you can do that have been shown to reduce the frequency of outbreaks when they're implemented regularly over time, the most popular being adding Lysine to your diet. "Lysine counteracts Arginine, which is the amino acid cold sores feed off," explains Sarah Brown, founder of Pai Skincare. "Foods rich in Lysine include eggs, meat, and soybeans." She goes on to add that some foods are naturally rich in arginine, like nuts, chocolate, and caffeine, which should be limited if you experience frequent outbreaks, and avoided if you feel an outbreak coming on. "You can also avoid

alcohol or refined sugar, and increase your intake of vitamin C to help bolster your immune system and accelerate healing time.”

02 Steer Clear of Common Cold Sore Triggers

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Cold sores are a symptom of a viral condition called herpes. Sometimes referred to as “fever blisters,” cold sores, or oral herpes, is incredibly common. In fact, the American Sexual Health Association states that nearly half of adults in the United States have oral herpes, which is caused by the herpes simplex virus 1 (type 2 is usually known as genital herpes.) “A cold sore is caused by a herpes virus infection, usually type 1,” explains Dr. Gary Goldenberg of Goldenberg Dermatology in NYC. “Patients usually have blisters that may be painful and red.” This condition can be spread a number of ways, from oral sex to kissing, although many people contract HSV 1 as children, usually through being kissed by a relative or friend. If you get cold sores, breakouts can occur without warning and for no known reason, but sometimes, certain outside stimulus can trigger an outbreak, including but not limited to:

- Stress
- Illness
- Sun exposure
- Anything that lowers the immune system

“Stress, illness, sun exposure, or anything that lowers the immune system can cause it,” says Dr. Goldberg. So, if you’re prone to cold sore outbreaks, do your best to keep your stress levels low, limit your time in the sun, or in any extreme weather conditions, and strengthen your immune system as best you can.

03 Use an Ice Press at the First Sign of an Outbreak

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A sensation some people experience before an outbreak is tingling or itchiness near where the outbreak will occur. Sarah Brown recommends reaching for an ice cube the moment you feel this sensation, if you can, which may help prevent sores from appearing. “As soon as you feel that first tingle apply an ice cube directly to the affected area for as long as you can bear it,” she says. “The shock is supposed to dull the nerve endings and stop the sore developing.”

04 Ask Your Doctor About Medication For Cold Sores

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In addition to, or in lieu of, taking a natural approach to preventing cold sores, you can manage potential breakouts (and treat existing ones) with the help of prescription medication. “Cold sores appear as small clusters of fluid-filled blisters that most commonly form on the lips or around the mouth, and in the nostrils,” says Brown. “On average, cold sores last for about ten days, but with the right management you can cut this time in half.” A good way to manage cold sore outbreaks is with antiviral medication, like Valtrex, Acyclovir, Famvir, or Denavir, according to the Mayo Clinic. “Taking a medication can prevent the cold sore or decrease its duration,” says Dr. Goldenberg, of cold sores that have already appeared on the skin. Medication can also work to prevent outbreaks from occurring when taken regularly, or at the very first signs that a cold sore is on the way. “For some patients, it’s necessary to take Valtrex daily to try and suppress breakouts. For most patients, taking medication at the first sensation or sight works also.”

05 As Always, Moisturize

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Dr. Goldenberg also states that moisturizing around the affected area can help the skin heal, and may also decrease the appearance of the sore, which can make applying concealer or other makeup that much easier, if you wish to cover up your outbreak. Makeup can be applied, but it’s recommended that you hold off if your blister is open and

exposed, as you could end up with an infection. Instead, wait until the sore scabs over, then hide redness with a green concealer before covering it up with a thick concealer in your skin tone, and finishing off with a dusting of loose powder. As always, be sure to keep your hands, makeup sponges and brushes clean and disinfected after use.

06 Wait Around 10 Days For the Sore to Run Its Course

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If all else fails, remember that Dr. Goldberg says the average life of a cold sore is around 10 days. If you have a cold sore outbreak on your skin, there are a few things you can do to alleviate the symptoms. The good news is, cold sores will go away on their own if you opt to not treat them at all, however, it is especially easy to pass the virus to someone else via skin-on-skin contact during this time. Medication will, most often, cut an outbreak duration in half, if not sooner, as well. In the meantime, there are a few things you can do to reduce the appearance of symptoms, and possibly help them heal sooner. It's recommended that you avoid touching the cold sore as much as possible to reduce the risk of possibly spreading the virus to other parts of your skin. From this point on, the best thing you can do is allow the outbreak to run its course, and do your best to avoid damaging your skin further. "Allow the cold sore to scab over and wait for it to drop off naturally so it's fully healed underneath. If you try and remove prematurely it can scar the skin which can take a long time to heal and fade," says Brown. "After a while the sore will naturally start to dry out and form a scab. It's best to allow this to fall off naturally as picking it prematurely can cause long lasting scarring on the lip membrane."