



How to treat symptoms based on mucous color

If mucous this color	Caused by	Treatment
White or Clear	Allergies	Saline, Antihistamines, Steroids
Yellow	Cold / Virus / Allergies / Irritants	Not antibiotics
Green	Cold / Virus / Allergies / Irritants	Not antibiotics
Brownish	Cold / Virus with dried blood	Not antibiotics
Reddish brown	Cold / Virus with irritation, blood.	Not antibiotics

Mucous is an important part of normal body performance. It's a protective coating on our mucous membranes that keeps them clean, protects from infection by catching bacteria and viruses and sweeping it away. It's as important as the oil in our engines.

Mucous contains antibodies to help fight infections, enzymes that traps and kills invaders, and proteins to make it thicker so bad things stick, as well as numerous other cells and ingredients.

The body can churn out 1-1.5 liters of mucous daily, it runs like a stream through your nose, throat and airway before it trickles down the throat and you normally wouldn't notice it. When it becomes thicker, you notice it and have the urge to cough or clear it up because now you feel it. Opposite effect is with allergies or spicy foods it runs thinner and is equally annoying.

Colored mucous has nothing to do with bacteria which surprises most people. When you have a cold your immune system sends white blood cells to the involved area to fight infection. These cells contain a greenish-colored enzyme so as the mucous ages it turns from clear to white to yellowish to greenish and as the cells age sometimes even brown as the tissue gets irritated and some red cells leak in.

Even more complicated, you can have perfectly clear mucous and have a sinus infection! Sinuses are air filled cavities in the face that when infected can block the entrance to the sinus and this causes significant facial pain and pressure as inflammation worsens and pus can build up inside.

How to reduce thin mucous production? Antihistamines reduce mucous production, so do decongestants by reducing blood flow to the area but decongestants are not safe for very long and should be avoided if you have heart problems, high blood pressure or risk of stroke.

How to thin out thicker mucous? Mucinex / Robitussin / guaifenesin which is called an expectorant. Thinner mucous is easier to expel from the body. Nasal irrigations with saline (neti pot) is very helpful with this.

The important thing is the longer the mucous stays in the airway, the more colors it changes, usually worse in the morning because it was not cleared out as well. It's not a sign of bacteria and certainly doesn't need an antibiotic based on color.