

ual drugs are too low," explains Gwaltney. And ingredients may actually be contradictory. An expectorant encourages coughing, but a cough suppressant controls it. Nor are over-the-counter drugs always harmless. Combining antihistamines with alcohol or major tranquilizers, for example, can depress your central nervous system, impair your motor coordination and knock you out. Nasal decongestants can cause a rebound effect if used for more than three days—your cold will actually be worse when you quit taking them. "It can be very unpleasant to go cold turkey," warns Gwaltney. Oral decongestants can increase blood pressure. "Over-the-counter or not," warns Dick, "people ought to check with their physicians about these drugs." And remember that antibiotics are useless against viral infections.

No matter how miserable you may feel, most colds are over in about a week. In the meantime, Dick believes that good ventilation to remove stale air may at least keep your roommate from catching your ailment. Ditto for keeping your used tissues to yourself. But can't you catch a virus from a doorknob or handshake? That's debatable. In a recent study, Dick kept groups of Wisconsin undergraduates up for 12 hours playing poker. At each table there were some infected players and others who were potential victims. At half the tables the potential victims wore large plastic collars that kept them from touching their hands to their faces and thereby infecting themselves with viruses shed on the cards or poker chips. Whether or not the players were wearing collars, they had the same rate of infection. "It appears that the primary dissemination of the virus is by air, not by hand-to-hand contact," concludes Dick.

To keep the viruses from ever becoming airborne, Dick has designed a series of "killer Kleenexes." An early model, impregnated with iodine, was "spectacular" in controlling colds in the Antarctic, but the iodine evaporated once the packages

## Old Moms' Tales About How to Treat Your Ills

**M**ost of us grew up with lots of conventional motherly wisdom about the avoidance and treatment of colds. Some of it is even correct:

■ **If you don't wear your goggles and sweater, you'll catch your death of cold.**

Colds are caused by viruses, not by coldness or dampness. Studies show that chilling the air before exposure to a virus, or even after exposure, has no measurable effect on whether or not people get sick. On the other hand, some animal research does seem to indicate that freezing temperatures may make you more susceptible. It's possible that cold slows down the action of the nasal cilia that normally sweep away invading viruses.

No one has tested students who stayed up for 48 hours to study for exams, then ran through the snow in T-shirts to the other side of campus to deliver term papers.

■ **If you have a cold, stay in bed and rest.**

There is no scientific evidence in favor of bed rest. However, taking it easy is common sense, and you do your friends a favor by staying out of classrooms and dining halls, where you could infect large numbers of people.

■ **Starve a fever, feed a cold, preferably with chicken soup.**

You should listen to Mom on this one. Hot drinks can loosen the phlegm in your throat and humidify the air around your nose to moisten dry, irritated

membranes. In at least one study, chicken soup proved superior to other hot liquids in clearing the nasal passages. Spicy foods have also been found to unblock a clogged nose.

■ **You can worry yourself sick.**

There is some evidence that stress can worsen a cold. One English study found that people who had experienced a stressful event in the previous six months, such as a death or divorce in the family, developed more severe symptoms. Introverts had worse symptoms than extroverts.

■ **'Kissing the hairy muzzle of a mouse' can cure a cold.**

There is no scientific evidence to support this remedy, which was touted, not by Mother, but by naturalist Pliny the Elder—before he died in the 79 A.D. eruption of Mount Vesuvius.

were opened. The other problem was esthetic: iodine turns your nose brown. Then Dick developed a tissue laced with plain old citric acid, which proved highly effective. Kimberly-Clark test-marketed the tissue last year under the brand name Avert, but it failed to catch on and has been "recalled for further thought."

In the meantime, humidify your room, drink hot liquids and gargle with salt water to ease a sore throat. There are times when a trip to the infirmary is necessary to rule

out more serious illness. A sore throat or cough that lasts for weeks should be looked into. Most colds are not accompanied by fever. If your fever goes above 103, or over 100 for more than three days, you may have the flu, pneumonia or mononucleosis. With most colds, the best strategy is to simply surrender and enjoy the sympathy. And if your mom is Jewish—at least at heart—it won't hurt to send home for a container of chicken soup.

SUSAN KATZ



KIMBLE

ILLUSTRATION BY KIMBLE MEAD