chapter **49**

Nasal Decongestants, Antitussives, and Cold Remedies

Objectives

AFTER STUDYING THIS CHAPTER, THE STUDENT WILL BE ABLE TO:

1. Describe characteristics of selected upper respiratory disorders and symptoms.
2. Review decongestant and adverse effects of adrenergic drugs.
3. Describe general characteristics and effects of antitussive agents.
4. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using combination products in treatment of the common cold.
5. Evaluate over-the-counter allergy, cold, cough, and sinus remedies for personal or clients' use.

Critical Thinking Scenario

New parents bring their 5-month-old into the clinic with symptoms of a cold. The mother states her daughter has a slight fever, a runny nose, and a cough. The baby has had difficulty sleeping and has been keeping the mother awake with her fussing. The baby's appetite has also decreased.

Reflect on:

- Worries and concerns new parents are likely to have about their sick infant.
- The effectiveness of an infant's immune system in resisting infection.
- How nasal stuffiness may affect smaller anatomic structures of the infant.
- Nonpharmacologic interventions to decrease cold symptoms.

OVERVIEW

The drugs discussed in this chapter are used to treat upper respiratory disorders and symptoms such as the common cold, sinusitis, nasal congestion, cough, and excessive secretions. Some of these diverse drugs are discussed more extensively in other chapters; they are discussed here in relation to their use in upper respiratory conditions.

THE COMMON COLD

The common cold, a viral infection of the upper respiratory tract, is the most common respiratory tract infection. Adults usually have 2 to 4 colds per year; schoolchildren may have as many as 10 per year. A cold often begins with dry, stuffy feelings in the nose and throat, an increased amount of clear nasal secretions, and tearing of the eyes. As the mucous membranes of the nose and throat become more inflamed, other common symptoms include cough, increased nasal congestion and drainage, sore throat, hoarseness, headache, and general malaise. Colds can be caused by many types of virus, most often the rhinovirus. Shedding of these viruses by infected people, mainly from nasal mucosa, can result in rapid spread to other people.

The major mode of transmission is contamination of skin or environmental surfaces. The infected person, with viruses on the hands from contact with nasal secretions (eg, sneezing, coughing), touches various objects (eg, doorknobs, faucet handles, telephones). The uninfected person touches these contaminated surfaces with the fingers and then transfers the viruses by touching nasal or eye mucosal membranes. The viruses can enter the body through mucous membranes. Cold viruses can survive for several hours on the skin and hard surfaces, such as wood and plastic. There may also be airborne spread from sneezing and coughing, but this source