

Tips for Staying Healthy this Cold and Flu Season



Feed A Cold, Feed A Fever

That sixteenth century maxim, “Feed a cold, starve a fever” is only partially correct. In fact, experts say, you should feed a cold and a fever.

When fighting a virus, such as a cold or influenza (the flu), your body needs energy, and the best source is healthy food. In addition, a fever, a common symptom of the flu, burns additional calories. When the body temperature increases, so does the demand for more energy or calories. If you suspect you are coming down with a cold or the flu, start eating!

Flu season usually begins with the onset of colder temperatures, typically between the months of October and May. Incidences of the flu tend to peak in February. Colds are most prevalent during the winter, when people tend to stay indoors in enclosed areas without adequate ventilation, such as a home with sealed windows and doors. That can result in stagnant air that harbors airborne bacteria, viruses, germs, and allergens.

While the flu and the common cold are both respiratory illnesses, they are caused by different viruses. However, the symptoms are similar, so it can be difficult to tell the difference. Generally, the flu manifests with a fever, body aches, extreme tiredness, and a dry cough. Symptoms of a cold are much milder, and typically involve a runny or stuffy nose.

Get a Flu Shot

The best method of preventing influenza is the “flu shot,” a vaccination designed to protect against the most common versions of the flu virus. However, the flu virus mutates rapidly, and researchers update the vaccine twice a year to adjust for those changes. Therefore, the vaccine provides protection for only one year, and a new vaccine must be administered the next year. While the effectiveness of each vaccine varies, the flu shot continues to protect a significant number of people from contracting the flu.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends that nearly all people over the age of six months get a flu shot each year, particularly young children, pregnant women, people with chronic health conditions like asthma, diabetes or heart and lung disease, and people 65 years and older.

The vaccine is available as an injection or a nasal spray. It is important to discuss the best option with your primary care doctor. It is recommended that vaccine be administered between October and November, before the peak flu season.

While the flu vaccine is considered safe, recipients may experience a slight fever, muscle pain, or fatigue for several days after inoculation. The vaccine should not be administered to people with severe allergies to eggs.

Minimize Risk of Becoming Ill

There is no vaccine for the common cold. However, other steps can be taken to minimize the risk of becoming ill with any virus, such as:

- *Avoid close contact with people suffering from a cold or flu.*
- *Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer.*
- *Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth. That is how germs are spread.*
- *Disinfect surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with germs and viruses.*
- *Eat healthfully and get adequate rest.*
- *Manage stress, which can have a negative impact on the immune system.*

If you get a cold or the flu, you can prevent the spread of the virus to family members, coworkers, and others:

- *While sick, limit contact with others as much as possible. If possible, stay in bed.*
- *If you are sick with a flu-like illness, stay home for 24 hours beyond when your body temperature returns to normal (98.6 F.). If you have a normal temperature for 24 hours without the use of a fever-reducing medicine, it is considered safe to return to work or school.*
- *Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.*
- *Avoid sharing cups and plates, utensils, and food or drink. If possible, use disposable dishes and utensils while still experiencing symptoms. Otherwise, wash everything in hot water with detergent, preferably in a dishwasher.*

Protect Your Health

A few simple steps can ensure that you and your family remain healthy:

- ✓ *Get a flu shot.*
- ✓ *Actively manage exposure to germs and viruses.*
- ✓ *Eat healthy foods and get plenty of sleep.*
- ✓ *Control stress, which has a negative impact on the immune system.*

Flu Treatment

If you suspect you have the flu, visit your primary care physician immediately. Certain anti-viral medications, which can significantly reduce the impact of the flu, are available.

Antibiotics, do not kill the cold or the flu viruses. When you start to feel ill, take these steps:

- 1 Stay home** While it may be tempting to “push through your illness,” that is the wrong approach. Adequate rest conserves energy and provides your body with the tools you need to fight back. Failure to take a break from daily life extends the time of recovery, and could lead to complications. Staying home when ill also prevents the spread of germs to other people.
- 2 Choose the right medications** There are many cold and flu remedies available that may relieve your symptoms. Choose one that treats your specific symptoms, not a broad spectrum of maladies. Read package labels carefully, and take medications only as directed. Do not mix medications, especially those that contain the same ingredients.
- 3 Stock up on appropriate supplies** Your recovery depends on having access to the appropriate medications, including pain relievers, fever reducers, and decongestants or antihistamines; germ-fighting products like soap, disinfectants, and hand sanitizers; and supplies that provide sustenance and comfort, such as herbal tea, chicken soup, and fluids that maintain hydration and restore electrolytes. A vaporizer and thermometer may also be helpful. Plan ahead and keep these supplies on hand before the cold and flu season begins.
- 4 Drink lots of fluids** Water, broth, and sports drinks will help thin mucus, drain sinuses, and relieve a stuffy nose. Hot drinks, like tea, warm the airways and relieve congestion. Fluids will also avoid dehydration caused by vomiting or diarrhea. Alcohol, however, should be avoided.



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