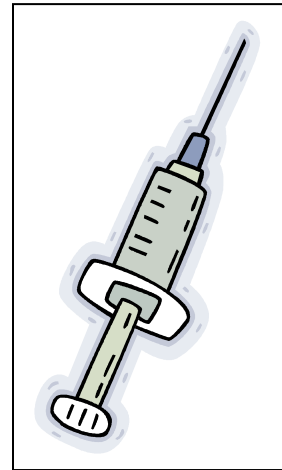


Avoiding the Flu

Since there are no known cures for colds and flu, prevention must be your goal. A proactive approach to warding off colds and flu is apt to make your whole life healthier.

Get a Flu Shot - The most effective way to prevent flu, frankly, is to get the flu shot. It may not be natural, but it works better than anything else. However, because of the shortage of vaccine, the CDC has set the following priority groups for vaccination with inactivated influenza vaccine this season:

- all children aged 6-23 months,
- adults aged 65 years and older,
- persons aged 2-64 years with underlying chronic medical conditions,
- all women who will be pregnant during influenza season,
- residents of nursing homes and long-term care facilities,
- children 6 months-18 years of age on chronic aspirin therapy,
- health-care workers with direct patient care, and
- out-of-home caregivers and household contacts of children aged <6 months.



Because of the urgent vaccine supply situation, people who are not included in one of the priority groups above should forego or defer vaccination.

Want to know where you can get a **flu shot**? [Click here](#)

Otherwise

There are other strategies you can employ as well. WebMD went to Charles B. Inlander, president of The People's Medical Society, for suggestions you may want to try:

Wash Your Hands



Most cold and flu viruses are spread by direct contact. Someone who has the flu sneezes onto their hand, and then touches the telephone, the keyboard, a kitchen glass. The germs can live for hours -- in some cases weeks -- only to be picked up by the next person who touches the same object. So wash your hands often. If no sink is available, rub your hands together very hard for a minute or so. That also helps break up most of the cold germs.

Don't Cover Your Sneezes and Coughs with Your Hands

Because germs and viruses cling to your bare hands, muffling coughs and sneezes with your hands results in passing along your germs to others. When you feel a sneeze or cough coming, use a tissue, and then throw it away immediately. If you don't have a tissue, turn your head away from people near you and cough into the air.

Don't Touch Your Face

Cold and flu viruses enter your body through the eyes, nose, or mouth. Touching their faces is the major way children catch colds, and a key way they pass colds on to their parents.

Drink Plenty of Fluids

Water flushes your system, washing out the poisons as it rehydrates you. A typical, healthy adult needs eight 8-ounce glasses of fluids each day. How can you tell if you're getting enough liquid? If the color of your urine runs close to clear, you're getting enough. If it's deep yellow, you need more fluids.



Take a Sauna

Researchers aren't clear about the exact role saunas play in prevention, but one 1989 German study found that people who steamed twice a week got half as many colds as those who didn't. One theory: When you take a sauna you inhale air hotter than 80 degrees, a temperature too hot for cold and flu viruses to survive.

Get Fresh Air

A regular dose of fresh air is important, especially in cold weather when central heating dries you out and makes your body more vulnerable to cold and flu viruses. Also, during cold weather more people stay indoors, which means more germs are circulating in crowded, dry rooms.

Do Aerobic Exercise Regularly

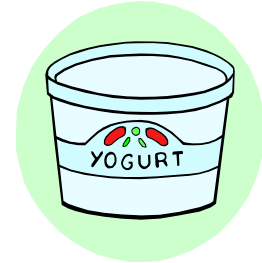
Aerobic exercise speeds up the heart to pump larger quantities of blood; makes you breathe faster to help transfer oxygen from your lungs to your blood; and makes you sweat once your body heats up. These exercises help increase the body's natural virus-killing cells.

Eat Foods Containing Phytochemicals

"Phyto" means plants, and the natural chemicals in plants give the vitamins in food a supercharged boost. So put away the vitamin pill, and eat dark green, red, and yellow vegetables and fruits.

Eat Yogurt

Some studies have shown that eating a daily cup of low-fat yogurt can reduce your susceptibility to colds by 25 percent. Researchers think the beneficial bacteria in yogurt may stimulate production of immune system substances that fight disease.



Don't Smoke

Statistics show that heavy smokers get more severe colds and more frequent ones. Even being around smoke profoundly zaps the immune system. Smoke dries out your nasal passages and paralyzes cilia. These are the delicate hairs that line the mucous membranes in your nose and lungs, and with their wavy movements, sweep cold and flu viruses out of the nasal passages. Experts contend that one cigarette can paralyze cilia for as long as 30 to 40 minutes.

Cut Alcohol Consumption

Heavy alcohol use destroys the liver, the body's primary filtering system, which means that germs of all kinds won't leave your body as fast. The result is, heavier drinkers are more prone to initial infections as well as secondary complications. Alcohol also dehydrates the body -- it actually takes more fluids from your system than it puts in.

Relax

If you can teach yourself to relax, you can activate your immune system on demand. There's evidence that when you put your relaxation skills into action, your interleukins - - leaders in the immune system response against cold and flu viruses -- increase in the bloodstream. Train yourself to picture an image you find pleasant or calming. Do this 30 minutes a day for several months. Keep in mind, relaxation is a learnable skill, but it is not doing nothing. People who try to relax, but are in fact bored, show no changes in blood chemicals.

[View Source](#)