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## 22 Ways to Survive Cold & Flu Season



Each year, the typical adult can expect to contract two or three colds, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Skip the annual flu vaccine and you set yourself up for a bout of that as well. But it doesn't have to be this way! Aside from good hand washing (with soap, for at least 20 seconds), "there's a lot you can do to drastically cut your risk of getting sick," says Holly Phillips, MD, a general internist in New York City. "And even if you do catch a bug, you may be able to cut short the duration of your illness." Arm yourself with these tips from the experts, and make this cold and flu season your healthiest yet.

### **Eat yogurt for breakfast**

The same live cultures that help ease digestive distress can help stave off a cold, says Dr. Phillips, who wrote *The Exhaustion Breakthrough*. A 2011 study backs this up: Scientists found that people who consumed probiotics via supplements or fermented foods (think yogurt, kefir and kimchi) had 12 percent fewer upper respiratory

infections.

### **Crack open a window**

Spending the day in a stuffy room with anyone who's under the weather raises your risk of catching a bug. Letting a little fresh air circulate keeps airborne viral particles on the move, making them harder to pick up, says Dr. Phillips.

### **Have some mushrooms**

New research published in the *Journal of the American College of Nutrition* offered evidence of their immune-boosting powers. People who ate a cooked shiitake mushroom daily for a month showed higher numbers of T cells and less inflammation.

### **Turn away from sneezers**

Sure, you hate to be rude, but moving out of firing range is crucial, says Dr. Phillips: "Germs carried in sneeze particles can travel 20 feet!" If a stranger next to you begins sneezing or coughing, excuse yourself and scoot to another seat. All you need to say: "I'm sorry—I always catch colds really easily."

### **Quit touching your lips**

You might as well lick a restroom door (ick). "Not touching your face greatly cuts your odds of getting sick," says Margarita Rohr, MD, an internist at the Mount Sinai Medical Center. But that's easier said than done: The average person puts a hand on her face with a cold more than three times an hour. To break the habit, try sitting on your hands when they're

### **Score regular sleep**

Get at least 7 hours of sleep

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### Score regular sleep

Take advantage of longer nights and log enough shut-eye. A study published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* found that subjects who slept for fewer than seven hours were nearly three times as susceptible to colds as people who slept for at least eight hours.

## **Flush out your nose**

Throughout cold season, add this to your nighttime routine: Rinse your nose using a neti pot with boiled (and cooled) salted water, or an over-the-counter nasal irrigator or saline solution. "It will help clear out viral particles you've breathed in during the day before they take root in your system," says Richard Lebowitz, MD, an otolaryngologist at NYU Langone Medical Center.

## **Pop zinc lozenges**

Try taking them as soon as you start feeling under the weather, says Dr. Lebowitz. Zinc is a mineral essential to the cells of the immune system, and a 2013 Cochrane Library analysis of 18 trials found that ingesting it within 24 hours of the onset of cold symptoms reduces the duration of the illness. The study authors recommend a daily dose of 75 milligrams.

In addition to cutting the time of your colds, zinc may boost your libido, help heal wounds, and prevent out-of-control inflammation.

## **Tap your chest**

There's an acupressure point in the middle of your breastbone, at the level of your third rib. "A series of gentle taps there, for about a minute every couple of hours, will prompt the thymus gland to produce more T cells to attack pathogens," says Daniel Hsu, a doctor of acupuncture and Asian medicine at New York AcuHealth in New York City.

## **Load up on liquids**

"Fluids help thin out the mucus that your body makes when you're sick," says Dr. Phillips. "And when that germ-filled mucus is thinner, it's easier to clear out of your system." She suggests downing at least 2 liters of water or other fluids a day.

Think it's the flu? Get an Rx, stat

If taken within the first 48 hours of symptoms, the prescription medication Tamiflu stops the virus from replicating and could reduce the length of time you're stuck in bed by a whole day. Before writing a script, your provider may use a rapid nasal swab test to confirm the diagnosis, says Dr. Phillips.

## **Try elderberry extract**

A syrup made from these little black berries has long been used as a folk remedy for viral infections. In concentrated form, the berries' nutrients seem to offer some relief from congestion, aches and pains, says Jaclyn Chasse, a naturopathic physician in Bedford, N.H. Indeed, a 2004 study in the *Journal of International Medical Research* suggests that taking a 15-milliliter dose of elderberry extract four times a day can cut short flu symptoms by four(!) days on average.

## **Keep getting those probiotics**

Research conducted in 2012 compared two groups of college students suffering from colds: The group that took a probiotic supplement with *Lactobacillus rhamnosus* recovered two days earlier and had symptoms that were 34 percent less severe.

## **Switch on a humidifier**

Dry indoor air makes a sore throat and wicked cough even worse. A humidifier helps these symptoms become more bearable by filling the air you breathe with moisture, says Rob Danoff, DO, program director at Aria Health in Philadelphia.

## **Order green curry**

It's true—chilies and other fiery spices can help clear your sinuses. "They make your nose run and your eyes water, and that may provide some temporary relief from congestion," says Dr. Phillips. Science supports the theory: A 2011 study found that a nasal spray made with a chemical called capsaicin, which is derived from hot peppers, rapidly improved congestion.

## **Inhale essential oils**

Dr. Chasse recommends this trick to her patients: Several times a day, add a few drops of thyme or eucalyptus oil to boiling water, then breathe in the aromatic steam. The menthol-like smell should make your airways feel as if they're opening up. Plus, adds Dr. Chasse, it's thought that antimicrobial particles in these essential oils coat the mucous membrane lining the nasal cavity.

## **When ill, skip your sweat session**

You might feel less draggy if you do some light exercise—think a brisk walk or gentle yoga class (no inversions!)—to boost your circulation. But if you're battling a bad cold or the flu, it's no time for a killer workout. "Your body needs to save energy to fight off the virus," explains Dr. Rohr.

## **Gargle with warm salt water**

Your mom was right: This really does work. Salt helps kill pathogens. What's more, coating your throat with a salt solution (1/2 teaspoon of salt in a cup of warm water) will ease inflammation and loosen mucus, which helps flush out germs, says Dr. Phillips.

## **Heat up chicken soup**

This classic comfort food is a multitasker: "The steam helps open stuffed-up nasal passages, and the salty broth can soothe a sore throat," says Dr. Phillips. But that's not all. Research published in the journal *Chest* found that chicken soup has properties that slow the movement of infection-fighting white blood cells; when they move more slowly, they spend more time in the areas of the body that need them most.

## **Have a spoonful of honey**

"Honey is believed to be antimicrobial, and its thick, syrupy consistency coats and soothes an irritated throat," notes Dr. Rohr.

## **Reach for a popsicle**

Throat so sore that it hurts to swallow? Sucking on an icy treat should offer temporary relief by numbing the area, says Dr. Danoff.

## **Prop yourself up**

"When you lie on your back, mucus collects in your sinus cavities, which can lead to secondary infections or chronic sinusitis," says Dr. Phillips. Instead, try resting and sleeping at a 45-degree angle. "Sitting up slightly will also help blood flow away from the head," she adds, "reducing inflammation of the sinuses and nose."

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