

The Season Is Here: Preventing and Treating Colds and Flu

Now that the colder weather is upon us, so is the cold and flu season. As it turns out, the cold weather isn't what causes us to become ill, it is instead the lowered immune response that comes with this time of year.

In other words, there are an equal number of viruses lurking around in the summer as in the winter. The difference is, in the summer our body's immune system is stronger, and therefore fights off the viruses, whereas in the winter, our body's immune system is weaker and we succumb to the viruses.

The good news is we can change that.

Vitamin D: One of the main immune boosters is Vitamin D, which comes from the sun. Obviously, most of us get more sun exposure in the summer than in the winter. Therefore, with the lack of Vitamin D in the winter, our immune systems are compromised. To remedy this, simply take a Vitamin D supplement and/or spend some time each day in front of a "Happy Light," such as the one made by Verilux, which is used to treat Seasonal Affective Disorder, also known as "SAD," a type of depression that is caused by lack of sunlight.

Stress: Another thing that causes our immune system to weaken, and increases the likelihood of catching a cold or the flu is stress. Most of us experience greater stress in the winter months as the holidays can be emotionally challenging, as can the isolation and depression that can carry into January and beyond. Reducing stress is one of the best things we can do for our overall health, yet one of the most difficult. Exercise, sleep and prayer are some of the best ways to reduce stress.

Sugar: Believe it or not, eating sugar weakens our immune system. Starting with Halloween, most of us tend to eat more sugar in the winter months than in summer. Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's, Super Bowl and Valentine's Day are all major sugar events. Cutting back on sugar intake is a way to help prevent colds and the flu.

Sleep: Getting adequate sleep is a key factor in maintaining a strong immune system. During the winter months and holidays, many of us find that we are overloaded with responsibilities from family, work and school that keep us from getting enough rest. This severely reduces our body's ability to fight attacking viruses.

Proper diet can greatly increase our body's immune system.

Coconut oil: Coconut oil kills viruses. This amazing fact is often overshadowed by the brain-boosting components of coconut oil. But the lauric acid in coconut oil has been proven to destroy viruses such as herpes and even HIV. It also kills many of the "bad" bacteria assaulting our body. Cooking with coconut oil as well as taking a tablespoon or two a day is a great immune-boosting routine.

Clean hands: Doctors say keeping the hands clean is the number one way to prevent illness. When we wash our hands, we should lather for twenty seconds, or about time it takes to sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice. Hand washing is best, but if soap and water are not available, hand sanitizer is a suitable substitution. Make sure it contains at least 60 percent alcohol, the more alcohol the better. Rub your hands until the hand sanitizer is dry. Make sure to clean your hands before eating, of course, but also try to keep your dirty fingers out of your mouth, nose, eyes ... and other entrances or "openings" such as open cuts, etc. This takes discipline, especially for those of us with contacts and allergies who are constantly rubbing our eyes.

Vitamin C: Vitamin C is a must for preventing colds and flu. Research shows that it works. Vitamin C supplementation is a great idea, as is eating vegetables high in Vitamin C such as red bell peppers, broccoli, butternut squash and Brussels sprouts. Most of us know citrus fruits are high in Vitamin C, but are also high in sugar, albeit natural, so lower-sugar produce is better.

Probiotic: Take a good probiotic. Probiotics increase the number of “good bacteria” in the gut. Scientists have discovered that about 80 percent of our immune function originates in the gut (intestines) and therefore a healthy gut is paramount to good health. You can also eat probiotic foods, such as fermented foods. The best is the Korean classic, kimchi, which you can make yourself or purchase at the store. Just make sure it’s refrigerated, as the canned variety is pasteurized and the good bacteria have been killed. Other fermented foods include pickles, again, the refrigerated kind, Kefir and yogurt (sugar-free!) with live cultures and refrigerated sauerkraut.

Zinc: Zinc is another immune booster. Many of us are familiar with the product, “Zicam,” which is really great at mitigating the symptoms of a cold. It works so well because the active ingredient is Zinc.

Bone broth: Speaking of what to do when you get a cold or flu, consider the time-honored classic, homemade chicken soup. No canned soup! Prepare it with bones. In other words, boil a whole chicken or cut-up chicken with bones, for an extended period of time. The resulting nourishing broth is anti-inflammatory, among other things.

Water: Drink plenty of water. No sugary drinks! Water flushes out the toxins and impurities in the body. Sweating is also a great way to expel toxins from the body, as well as relieve stress, as mentioned above.

Hydrogen peroxide: One of the most interesting ways to relieve the symptoms of a cold and shorten its duration is by pouring a small amount of hydrogen peroxide in each ear! It sounds crazy, but it really works. Hydrogen peroxide is very cheap and can be purchased at any grocery store or pharmacy. Just fill the cap from the bottle and pour it in one ear, keeping your head tilted down for a minute or two, then repeat the process on the other ear.

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