

Outpost Exchange
Eating Well for the Cold and Flu Season
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Odds are, you will catch a cold or the flu this year, most likely during the winter months. “In the winter time, we go inside, close our doors and turn on the heaters. We’re not getting good, fresh air and our environment gets more toxic,” said Dr. Meredith Young, ND, a Doctor of Integrative Medicine practicing in Shorewood. There is also less sunlight, and therefore less ultraviolet light to kill viruses, and more overall stress and depression, which can suppress the immune response and predispose our bodies to infection.

It is estimated that adults suffer two to five colds per year, while infants and preschool children have an average of four to eight colds per year. But a number of area alternative health and nutrition experts suggest that getting sick may not be completely negative. They also offer some advice on ways to get through it and some ideas on how to boost your immune system so that you may be able to ward off—or at least diminish the severity—of colds and flu.

A Blessing

“A cold or flu is the body’s way of cleansing and detoxing,” according to Dr. Young. “We build up an accumulation of toxins--through exposure to solvents, pollutants, processed foods, pesticides--and sometimes we need to do a cleanse. When you actually do a conscious cleanse, you get many of the same symptoms of a cold or flu,” she said. These symptoms are known to all of us: elevated temperature, increased mucous, perhaps loose bowels and headache. So, according to Dr. Young, getting sick can be viewed as an important function for cleansing our systems. “We often just don’t feel blessed with the timing,” she said.

Dr. Gary Lewis, M.D., is a holistic physician in private family practice at Brown Deer Family Health Care in Milwaukee. He, too, suggests we embrace these pesky illnesses and look at the positive. “A virus’s symbol is about change. Wherever it infects, something needs changing,” he said. “It’s cleaning out the old and making way for the new. It’s not always a bad thing to get a virus. It helps to make the affected area stronger, in a way.”

Accepting these viruses as a backhanded blessing does not mean we have to simply endure the suffering of the sniffles and other symptoms. There are a number of ways to ease the discomfort and perhaps even shorten the life span of these illnesses. These tactics often work as preventative measures as well as treatments. Dosages are based on general advice for an average adult. All health care providers interviewed stressed that if you get sick often or if an illness persists, that it is an indication of something more serious and that you seek further, specific advice.

Eating Well for the Cold and Flu Season—Add One

Prevention Recommendations

“There’s no magic formula for avoiding cold and flu,” said Dr. Lewis. “It’s proportional to how well-functioning your immune system is.” Therefore, as a preventative measure, it’s important to focus on strengthening the immune system. Dr. Lewis and others cite a few simple observances: eat a well-balanced diet packed with fresh fruits and vegetables, get at least 30 minutes of exercise a day, drink at least 8 glasses of water a day and get your rest. “If you’re eating well and getting enough fruits and vegetables, you’re fueling yourself well,” according to Dr. Lewis. “If you’re then getting rest and exercise, you’re doing all the things your immune and emotional systems like.”

To give your diet an immunity-building check up, read on.

Bell peppers received high marks for their “outstanding ability to boost your immune system and fight free-radical damage to your cells,” in an article by Rebecca Broida Gart entitled “25 Power Foods” in the October, 2000 issue of *Natural Health*. The article goes on to state, “Green, yellow and orange peppers are among the best sources of vitamin C, but red bell peppers are even better—they provide three times as much vitamin C as oranges.” In the same article, Brazil nuts were cited as a good source of vitamin E and selenium (two nuts provide about 150 mcg) and kale was heralded as offering more antioxidant power than any other vegetable, as per a study at the Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging at Tufts University in Boston. Finally, shiitake mushrooms were touted for both their anti-viral and immune-boosting effects, while papaya, full of beta carotene and vitamin C, was also on the immunity-builder “A” list.

Nutritional consultant and author Eileen Faughey of Boulder, CO points out in her book, *Quickflip to Delicious Dinners* (Nutrition Connections, 1999), that foods such as citrus fruits, wine, broccoli, peppers, onions, tomatoes, nuts and whole grains can boost your immune system with anti-oxidants like beta-carotene, vitamins C and E, selenium and bioflavonoids (a group of substances found in fruits essential for the absorption and processing of vitamin C).

Raw garlic should be included on any immunity-enhancing menu. The “Russian Penicilin” tops the list with all practitioners interviewed as an excellent food to help prevent cold and flu. Known for centuries as a natural blood cleanser and de-toxifier, it has been used medicinally for over 5,000 years in the Middle East. “Garlic is said to boost the immune system and is a natural antibiotic,” according to Judy Mayer, DTP at Outpost Natural Foods. She and others suggest mincing it up to toss with salads or chopping and topping off steamed vegetables, rice or soups. Some recommend cutting it into small pieces and swallowing with water like aspirin.

Eating Well for Cold and Flu Season—Add Two

“Raw garlic will help keep viruses away,” said Dr. Young. “Of course, it will keep people away, too!” Dr. Edie Beguelin, a holistic chiropractor practicing in Whitefish Bay, offers a helpful hint for getting rid of garlic breath: chew fresh parsley. To remove the odor from your fingers: immediately after handling, rub a stainless steel spoon over your hands while under running water. Follow with lemon juice.

To round out your diet, Dr. Beguelin also suggests including fish oils, ghee, flax seed and evening primrose oil to provide the fats our brains need and legumes to provide protein, while Mayer reminds us that immunity-boosting zinc can be found in fortified whole grains, breads, legumes and cereals.

In addition, supplements can provide a protective shield against viral infections. These supplements can be covered with one multi-vitamin or taken separately. Daily recommendations include:

500-1,000 mg of vitamin C

5,000-10,000 mg of vitamin A

20,000 IU beta carotene

400-800 IU vitamin E

15 mg zinc

25+ mg of the B vitamins.

Dr. Young recommends including astragalus, which boosts immunity and has anti-bacterial, anti-inflammatory and antiviral effects. Many practitioners consider astragalus a good immune tonic for people who frequently succumb to infections.

Apart from diet and supplements, there are a few other preventative measures you can follow:

The Outpost’s Mayer points out that washing your hands is one of the best prevention practices. “This is truly the biggest thing you can do to prevent a cold or flu,” she stated. Colds and flu—which are viral infections and therefore cannot be treated with antibiotics—are often passed by touch, especially by children who may stifle a runny nose with a hand. In addition to washing hands, try to avoid shaking hands with those who are sick.

Another simple preventative measure is to turn on the humidifier. “Forced air is dry and it dries the nasal passages, which creates a better environment for bacteria,” said Dr. Young. She also advises that you stay warm. “Not that getting cold is the reason we get sick, but when we’re cold the core body temperature drops and if the body is spending time increasing its temperature it may not have the energy to ward off infection,” she said. In addition to keeping your head and feet covered, Dr. Young suggests taking 1,000-1,500 mg a day divided of cayenne pepper, which she recommends in capsule form. “I start using cayenne pepper in October and go until about April,” she said. It is known to increase circulation and burn mucas.

Eating Well for the Cold and Flu Season—Add Three

Tips for Treatment

As diet plays an important role in prevention, it is also a major component to getting well. Following are suggestions on what to eat—or not—to ease your symptoms and hasten your recovery.

DO

- **Lighten up**—At the onset of illness, start eating lightly—lots of broth, steamed vegetables and brown rice. “The thought is to let your body spend its energy on detoxing and getting rid of the illness, rather than on digesting,” Dr. Young explained. If you have a fever, she suggests including a light protein, such as legumes.
- **Keep a Dairy-Free State**--The Outpost’s Mayer recommends staying away from dairy when you have a cold because it produces mucous.
- **Be a BRAT**--Mayer cites the long-standing BRAT diet--bananas, rice, applesauce and toast--to nurse yourself along when you have the flu. Bananas because they have potassium and electrolytes that you lose through vomiting or diarrhea, rice to ease digestion, applesauce made with peelings on to get the pectin under the skin which helps to solidify diarrhea, and toast as a “pick me up.” She also suggests eating low-fat yogurt after the flu to help rebuild good bacteria.
- **Drink up!**—Fluids are key to keeping the toxins moving out of your body. Consume at least eight 8-ounce glasses of water a day. In addition, you can sip tea or a warming broth (see recipes below). Avoid alcohol because it is dehydrating, and caffeine, especially with the flu, as it stimulates the lower bowel.
- **Get your rest**— “People need a lot of rest when they are sick,” states Dr. Lewis. As a preventative measure, he suggests at least one hour a day to unwind and de-stress. Dr. Ellen Potthoff, a naturopathic physician in California suggests in an article on the Healthwell website that, “at the first sign of illness, slow down immediately and rest to prevent the illness from taking hold. It is better to stop activity in the short term rather than having your activity stop you.”

Exercise is critical as a preventative measure; however, once you are sick, it is suggested that you not push yourself.

- **Pick the “stinking rose”**—Eat 3-5 cloves of raw garlic a day as soon as symptoms start until they desist.
- **Dose to the max**—At the onset of a cold, a number of practitioners recommend increasing to a high dosage of vitamin C—as much as 1,000 mg an hour, until you reach bowel intolerance. The next day, back off 1,000 mg of the amount at which you reached bowel intolerance. The buffered form of Vitamin C is reportedly easier on the gastrointestinal tract.

Eating Well for the Cold and Flu Season—Add Four

Other supplements to take at the onset of cold:

- increase vitamin A to 100,000 IU for no more than three days, reduce to 50,000 IU for another three days, then return to every day levels.
- take one dropperful of echinacea every hour for the first day, then reduce to 3-4 times a day for a week, or until symptoms disappear. It is not recommended that you take echinacea for an extended period of time.

Don't

Be Sweet--Although most people reach for the OJ at the first sign of a cold, Dr. Beguelin and Dr. Lewis both caution against drinking large quantities of orange juice or other fruit juices—despite the vitamins they may impart—because of the high sugar content. “There are 60 grams of vitamin C in one orange. You need to squeeze a heck of a lot of oranges to get enough vitamin C,” said Dr. Lewis.

Likewise, soda is not a good resource for liquid intake. “Sugar weakens the immune system,” Dr. Beguelin stated. Other colleagues, locally and nationally, agree that sugar can compromise your immune system. According to Dr. Kenneth Bock, M.D., an expert in nutritional and environmental health with practices in Rhineback and Albany, N.Y., two cans of soda (which together typically contain 20-24 teaspoons of sugar) reduce the efficiency of white blood cells by 92 percent—an effect that lasts up to five hours. “Because white blood cells are an integral part of your immune system, if you happen to meet a nasty virus within five hours of drinking a few sodas, your immune system may be unable to fight off the invader,” wrote Dr. Carolyn Dean, M.D., N.D., in an article in the January/February 2001 issue of *Natural Health* magazine.

Comfort Foods and More

Chicken soup is not just good for the soul—it can help cure what ails you, according to Dr. Lewis. That's because it contains cysteine, which has antiviral properties. It's also an excellent subterfuge for your raw garlic and good way to increase your liquid intake. Dr. Young provides this recipe for quick chicken soup:

Start with 2 cups chicken broth (vegetable broth can be used instead)

3-4 cloves of garlic peeled and sliced

1 onion sliced

¼ tsp cayenne pepper

Simmer lightly and drink, with or without the veggies, as the broth retains the essence of the garlic and onion.

Hot tea is comforting and soothing. Dr. Lewis offers this simple recipe for a healing brew:

Grate fresh ginger into hot water, add lemon juice and honey to taste. If you're more daring, you may wish to add ¼ tsp cayenne pepper to really stimulate mucous glands and loosen phlegm or add some chopped up garlic to increase the anti-viral properties. After steeping for several minutes, the chopped ginger and garlic can be strained out.

Eating Well for the Cold and Flu Season—Add Five

A hot bath feels good, especially when you have body aches or chills. Dr. Young shared a recipe for a detox bath that can be done once a week to pull out toxins when you have the flu or a cold, or if you just want to detoxify.

Draw a bath as hot as you can tolerate. Add 1 cup baking soda, 1 cup uniodized sea salt and two inches ginger root grated or sliced (if grated, place it in a cheese cloth). Relax in the bath for 25 minutes and enjoy an herbal tea or the ginger tea outlined above. Be prepared to perspire! Drain the tub and take a cold shower to close the pores and activate the bone marrow, which helps the immune system. Dry off, bundle up and jump under the covers.

In your quest to remain healthy this winter, remember that catching a cold or flu may be your body's way of sending you a message. "We often look at illness as 'What did I do wrong?' when really the message is something higher," said Dr. Lewis.

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