



How to Keep from Getting Sick

Three Methods: [Preventing the Common Cold and Flu](#) [Strengthening Your Immune System](#) [Avoiding Diseases](#)

When cold and flu season rolls around, is it inevitable that you're going to get sick? It doesn't have to be. If you make a point of taking certain precautions, like washing your hands *a lot*, and building up your immune system, you may escape the season with a clean bill of health. See Step 1 to learn how to keep from getting common viruses as well as more serious diseases by taking a few simple precautions.

Method
1

Preventing the Common Cold and Flu

1 Wash your hands. This is the single most effective way to keep yourself from getting the cold or flu and make sure you don't spread it to anyone else.^[1] The cold virus is easily spread through touch, so washing your hands is the best way to get rid of it when you pick it up. It's especially important to wash your hands after being in a public space where lots of people who might have the cold and flu have touched what you touched. Wash your hands thoroughly with warm water and soap after you:

- Ride the subway, bus, or train
- Go to the grocery store or any other highly-trafficked store
- Go to school or work
- Go to a public restroom
- Use gym equipment^[2]

2 Don't touch your eyes, nose and mouth before washing. Touching banisters and elevator buttons is unavoidable, but you *can* avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Touching these parts of your face makes it easy for the cold or flu to get into your system. Don't rub your eyes, wipe your nose or lick your fingers before you get a chance to wash your hands with warm water and soap.

- Antibacterial gel and wipes are handy to have around for when there's not a facility nearby to wash your hands.
- If you must wipe your nose or touch your face, cover your hand with a tissue - or worst case, a sleeve - to avoid transmitting germs directly from your fingers to your face.

3 Don't share food and drinks with others. During cold and flu season, it's best to turn down offers to share food and drinks. Coming into contact with someone else's saliva or mucous is a sure way to catch whatever virus they might be incubating. Use your own utensils and get your own cup instead of sharing with someone else.

4 Avoid sharing personal items. Maybe it's obvious that you shouldn't use someone else's toothbrush, but there are other personal items you should also avoid sharing. Don't use someone's razor, nail clippers and other items that come into contact with their bodily fluids. The same goes for sharing towels, washcloths, and even bedding items, like sheets and pillow cases. These items can all pass along someone else's cold or flu germs.

- Don't share people's makeup, either. Using someone else's lipstick, eyeliner, mascara, and foundation could transfer their germs to your face.
- Avoid using someone else's cell phone, and sanitize your own frequently.

5 Try to stay away from people who are sick. If you think that someone may be ill, it's a good idea to keep a safe distance while you're interacting with that person.^[3]

- You could also consider wearing a face mask when you go out to filter out bacteria and viruses.

Get a flu shot. When everyone around you is sick, you're going to need to take extra care to avoid getting ill. One

- 6** smart preventative measure is to get a flu shot, which many people find keeps them well until flu season passes. See your doctor to get a flu shot, or visit a local pharmacy to get one at a discount.
- Different flu shots are approved for different groups of people. Some are meant to be administered only to people 18 years or older, while others are designed for children or babies. Be sure to go to a professional clinic to get the right type of shot.^[4]
 - If you are considered "high risk," you should definitely get a flu shot. The "high risk" category includes the following groups: people over 65 or under 5, pregnant women, and people with certain medical conditions.^[5]

**Method
2****Strengthening Your Immune System**

- 1 Eat plenty of vitamin-rich foods.** No matter what type of illness you're trying not to catch, you can give yourself the best chance of staying healthy by having a diet rich in essential vitamins and minerals. People who are malnourished experience higher rates of disease and illness.^[6] Make sure your diet includes the following components, all of which have been linked to immune system health, to keep your immune system strong:
- **Vitamin A.** Eat carrots, sweet potatoes, leafy greens, squash, apricots and melons.^[7]
 - **Vitamin B.** Eat beans, vegetables, poultry, fish, and meat.
 - **Vitamin C.** Eat papaya, broccoli, bell peppers, oranges, kiwi, strawberries and brussels sprouts.^[8]
 - **Vitamin D.** Get plenty of sun and eat salmon, herring and soy.^[9]
 - **Vitamin E.** Eat almonds, walnuts, sunflower seeds, wheat germ, and peanut butter.^[10]
 - **Selenium.** Eat tuna, shrimp, salmon, turkey, chicken, and other fish.^[11]
 - **Zinc.** Eat seafood, beef, wheat germ, spinach and cashews.^[12]
- 2 Stay hydrated.** Drinking enough water - and getting water through fruits and vegetables - is essential to keeping your immune system strong and helping your body expel germs. Drink 8 cups a day to keep yourself in good health, and step it up when you feel an illness coming on. Make sure you stay hydrated from morning til night.^[13]
- 3 Get rest.** You've probably experienced this scenario: you pulled two all-nighters in a row, and on the third day you came down with a cold. Sleep deprivation makes the body less able to combat illness, and more susceptible to getting sick in the first place.^[14] Aim to get at least 7 - 8 hours every night.
- 4 Try to reduce the amount of stress you're under.** Related to the issue of sleep is the amount of stress in your life. Social or psychological stress can take a toll on the body's immune response, too. Stress can disrupt the body's communication between the nervous system, endocrine (hormonal) system, and immune system. Basically, stress keeps them from choreographing a delicate balance that allows you to stay healthy. Scientists believe that stress sends out a steady trickle of hormones that affect the function of your body's white blood cells, which are the immune response's fighters.^[15]
- 5 Cut back on drinking and smoking.** Drinking alcohol and smoking lead to a host of health problems, and they exacerbate common illnesses as well. If you're feeling a little under the weather, pass on going out for drinks or smoking cigarettes. Drink water, eat a good meal, and go to bed early instead, and you just might be able to avoid getting sick.
- 6 Make exercise a priority.** Daily exercise is best, but if you can't commit to a daily routine, try to include exercise in your regimen at least three times per week. Working out keeps your oxygen supply going, detoxifies your body, and simply strengthens your body inside and out^[16].
- 7 Harness the power of steam.** Add moisture to the air through technology (vaporizer, humidifier) or the old-fashioned way (pots of hot water). When the air around you gets very dry, your body's mucus membranes tend to dry out. Although mucus may seem nasty and useless, it's incredibly important: it contains lots of helpful antibodies that are designed to prevent illness, and it doubles as a sort of flypaper that traps would-be intruders (bacteria) before they have time to fully get into your system.^[17]
- Get just the right amount of humidity in the air. Try to keep the humidity between 30% and 50% in the summer, and between 30% and 40% in the winter.^[18] Dip below 30% humidity and the mucus gets too dry; go above

50% and you're prone to giving yourself a different set of health problems.

8 Use immune-boosting herbs. While most herbs haven't been proven to prevent sickness, there are a few that seem to help. There's no harm in drinking herbal tea and incorporating herbs into your diet in order to give yourself the best chance to avoid sickness. Try the following healthy herbs:

- Garlic has been shown to help prevent infection.
- Ginseng is said to boost immune function.^[19]
- Probiotics help with digestion and to prevent infection.
- Echinacea is commonly used as a preventative measure against colds, but its efficacy is controversial in the medical community.^[20]

Method
3

Avoiding Diseases

1 Get appropriate vaccinations. Many sicknesses can be prevented by vaccines administered during childhood or later in life. If you aren't vaccinated against common illnesses, or you aren't sure whether your vaccinations are up to date, talk with your doctor about getting vaccines. Chicken pox, for example, has been all but wiped out thanks to vaccinations. The same goes for measles, polio and other once-common illnesses.^[21]

2 Take precautions when traveling. If you're planning to travel to another country, look into whether you should take precautions to keep from getting sick. You won't be used to the food and water there, and you'll be exposed to new pathogens. Take the following precautions:

- Visit a doctor to get vaccines and preventative medication if you're going to a place where malaria, tuberculosis, and other illnesses are easy to contract.
- Find out what food and water is safe to eat and drink in the region where you're traveling. You might want to bring your own provisions to be on the safe side.
- Bring a mosquito net if you're going to a place where [malaria](#) is commonly spread.

3 Practice safe sex. Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) aren't difficult to prevent if you take precautions. Be sure to use a condom or another barrier that prevents the transmission of STIs during sex. If you have a long-term partner, you and your partner should both get tested for common STIs.

Tips

- Drinking water flushes your system. Make sure you drink lots to keep you fresh and feeling better. Drink even more if you have a fever. Becoming dehydrated won't help your situation.
- Think about something else or talk to someone.
- If you have been able to eat a little something and keep it down, try taking some Pepto Bismol or drink something like ginger ale.
- People may treat you better because you are ill.
- Eat light meals if your stomach is affected. (Tea and toast, eggs, baked potato, etc.) Avoid acidic food and drink as these can make your stomach unsettled.
- Get plenty of sleep and drink plenty of water. Prop up your head with pillows when sleeping as it will avoid in you walking up and being sick.
- Watch a movie or play video games. Watch a comedy. It takes your mind off of the pain.
- Go through the alphabet, naming animals / plants/ pop groups etc that begin with each letter. This is a good distraction method.
- Decide whether you should call in sick to school or work.

Warnings

- If you are truly ill, never try to stop yourself from throwing up as this is your body's natural defense mechanism.
- Don't panic, it makes you worse.
- Do not eat.

Sources and Citations

1. <http://www.webmd.com/cold-and-flu/cold-guide/keeping-catchy-infections-contained>
2. <http://www.foxnews.com/health/2013/11/21/20-surprising-ways-to-prevent-colds-and-flu/>
3. <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/habits.htm>

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