

3 ways to avoid the flu

There are some surprisingly simple steps to help you stay healthy during cold and flu season, from getting a flu shot to getting more sleep.

1

Get immunized

Help yourself avoid the body aches, fever, coughing, sore throat, and all the other terrible flu symptoms by getting a flu shot.

Protecting yourself with a flu shot is especially important if you are at higher risk for developing problems from the flu. This can include children up to age 4, adults age 50 and older, women who will be pregnant during flu season, and anyone with long-term health problems or an impaired immune system. It's also smart to get immunized if you are a healthcare worker or if you live with someone who is at risk for developing problems from the flu.

The flu shot may keep you from getting the flu and help prevent spreading it to others. Most cases of the flu can be prevented with the vaccine. But even if you do get the flu after receiving the vaccine, your symptoms will be milder. You'll also have less chance of problems from the flu. You cannot get the flu from the flu vaccine.

You should not get a flu shot without talking to your doctor first if you are allergic to eggs, or had a serious reaction to the vaccine in the past. Your doctor may advise against the shot in some cases if you are ill. The flu shot is not recommended for children younger than 6 months.

2

Practice good hygiene

Especially during cold and flu season, washing your hands is one of the most effective ways to avoid the bug. Cold and flu viruses can enter your body through your eyes and nose. During cold and flu season, it's hard to avoid touching things that have the virus on them, such as doorknobs and grocery carts. When you rub your eyes or touch your nose, you could be infecting yourself without knowing it.

Be sure to wash your hands vigorously with soap and water, and do it often. Some doctors recommend that you wash for as long as it takes to sing the "Happy Birthday" song. Others advise washing for twice as long, or about 20 seconds.

Another good hygiene tip involves relearning a better way to cough. Although many of us learned to cover our coughs and sneezes with our hands, medical experts now recommend that we cough into our arm. Using your arm helps prevent you from loading germs onto your hands, which can spread the bug further.

3

Build your immunity

You can give your immune system an edge by taking care of yourself, including getting the sleep you need. Sleep actually strengthens the immune system. And it's natural to feel like you need more sleep when your body is fighting germs.

Keeping nutritious foods in your diet also helps your immune system. Choose foods that are loaded with the vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients you need to stay healthy. During flu season, it's smart to start with a well-balanced diet and stay hydrated.

Regular exercise is good for your immune system. Getting fresh air and stretching are recommended. Vigorous physical activity can increase stress hormone levels, however. So, if you're starting to feel ill, make sure you stop and rest.

Your next move

Take care of yourself and stay healthy this cold and flu season by following these tips. And check with your doctor to see if you should get vaccinated.