

TIPS FOR KEEPING AHEAD OF THE COLD AND FLU GERMS

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You need to keep healthy and performing. Here are some brief notes to help you avoid picking up cold or flu viruses and to stay well.

Q: Where do the germs make an entrance?

A: Your nose ... and eyes!



Hands and finger tips: transfer germs very efficiently. You are far more likely to pick up a cold by touching contaminated surfaces such as door handles, light switches, sinks, hand rails on buses and trains. Think about other surfaces where more than one person touches them. Bugs can last for 24hours or longer on these surfaces.

What about shaking hands with someone else? wash yours as soon as is polite to do so! Alternatively, use a **hand-santiser gel** (Boots, M&S, supermarkets and others stock these small bottles which easily fit into a coat pocket.)

“Your single best defence is to wash your hands with soap and water regularly” (Prof Ron Eccles, Common Cold Centre, Cardiff)

... and a little creative thinking can help reduce the transfer of these germs e.g. try using a knuckle to switch off that light, wear gloves on public transport etc.

Goal: try to avoid touching your nose or rubbing your eyes with your finger-tips until you have washed them.

Your Nose: nasal mucus carries germs.

“Sneezing or coughing into the crook of your arm to avoid spreading the virus [is good to do]” (Dr Sarah Brewer.)

Breathe through a scarf in the cold weather. The chilled air or your body feeling “chilled” makes you much more vulnerable. Beware fog ... not healthy; breathe through your nose (preferrably being kept warm by a scarf).

Sleep: research shows that **getting a good night’s sleep** is one of the simplest and best ways to boost the various systems and resources that your body has in order to keep healthy and/or to heal you from a range of illness and injuries. It seems that, during sleep, the “night-shift” clocks on and visits all systems for maintenance and repair work. Research at Carnegie Mellon University in the States found that the more sleep you get, the more chances you have of fighting off respiratory bugs. People who slept fewer than 7 hours a night were nearly three times more likely to come down with a cold.

Stress: evidence shows that people who are more stressed have weaker immune systems than their calmer counter-parts. There are many resources on-line to learn about stress and how to minimise it. Explore ways to **unwind and relax.**

“..... the increase in the release of corticosteroid hormones associated with stress are known to decrease resistance to infection”. (Cohen S. Psychological Stress and Susceptibility to Upper Respiratory- Infections.)

Hydration: evidence shows that water helps the airway from drying out. In Japan, it is popular to gargle with water. There is evidence to support its testimony to people being better protected from bugs taking hold. Research shows 30% **less incidence of colds as a result of drinking enough still water and gargling with it.**

Go green: The Babraham Institute in Cambridge found that eating plenty of **leafy-green veg** can boost your immune system. It turns out that cruciferous vegetables – from pak choi to broccoli – contain food chemicals that help ensure white blood cells function at peak performance to fight off infections. The darker the leaf, the better.

Superfoods: Onions and garlic are noteworthy, some swear by the properties in ginger. They are worth checking out on-line where you can read about various berries and fruits, vegetables like beetroot, grains and nuts, certain spices and herbs etc. A few examples: **Garlic:** contains allicin, which can help to “zap” a cold and provide a powerful boost to the immune system. Research shows that this is probably due to the antimicrobial properties that are in garlic. **Probiotics:** (either tablets from a health food shop or in live yoghurt) boost the good bacteria inside us and the evidence points to how helpful these are in keeping your immune system strong. **Echinacea:** Folk lore tells us that the native Americans used this plant to treat coughs, colds and sore throats. Scientific evidence indicates Echinacea’s effect on the immune system. It stimulates the activity of white blood cells.

Vitamins and minerals: NOTE: they are not a substitute for a healthy balanced diet.

Vitamin C: has been proven to help the immune system. **Vitamin D:** needs boosting. It has two sources: sunlight and food. The sun tends to disappear behind cloud in Autumn and Winter so food sources are important (wild salmon, tuna, sardine, sole, eggs, cereal, Shiitake mushrooms, liver, Ricotta cheese, milk)... although the milk and cheese may not be helpful to your voice on a performance day. **Zinc:** helps to metabolise certain vitamins to maximum effect.

*“Zinc is important in the diet ... 80 enzymes are known to require zinc for their normal activity. Zinc also plays a role in the synthesis of proteins and **zinc ions have been shown to inhibit viral replication** ... inhibiting the synthesis of the proteins which form the viral shell. It has also been proposed that zinc medications may coat the common cold viruses, such as the rhinovirus, and prevent them from attaching to the nasal cells.”* (Common Cold Centre, Cardiff University)

Physical exercise and fitness: Helps to boost your immune system significantly. A new study, published in *The American Journal of Medicine*, shows **exercise** to be a surprisingly potent vaccine. A brisk walk for 30 minutes five days a week, *“Increases blood flow [and] stimulates the immune system,”* (Cornelia Ulrich, PhD). Each bout of exercise may boost virus-fighting cells called leukocytes. **The one caveat:** You can overdo it. *“A big exertion is immunosuppressive,”* says Ulrich. *“It may be that a little bit of stress to the body is good and stimulating, but too much will cause problems.”*

Don’t make it harder for yourself: **Give excess booze a boot** - it can reduce the effectiveness of your immune system, irritate and inflame your liver - which may not then function as well. **Don’t go up in smoke** - it irritates the lining in your nose and airway, compromises the efficiency of the immune system to fight cold or flu viruses, deposits heavy toxins all over the body and lead to a range of serious illnesses. And on that note ... I personally know two people who are amputees as a direct result of smoking(!)

