

Dr. Allen's Top 20 Strategies for Winter Wellness

Wellness Strategy #1: Put Your Feet First

A case of cold feet can do more than spoil a good opportunity, it can even make you sick. "When feet get chilly, it actually tightens up the blood vessels in the sinuses," says Ron Eccles, Ph.D., director of the Common Cold Centre at Britain's Cardiff University. Here's how: Chilly feet send a message to your brain to take action to conserve your body's heat. The brain responds by firing out messages that reduce blood flow to areas where heat is lost quickly, and that includes the mucus membranes of the sinuses. When blood flow is reduced to the sinuses, so is the flow of infection-fighting white blood cells, leaving your body more vulnerable when viruses invade. Fortunately, a recent study reveals that keeping your feet warm, with a pair of plush socks, for instance, can cut risk of colds as much as 67 percent.

Wellness Strategy #2: Unleash the Power of Peaches

According to USDA researchers, frozen peaches, which are processed at the peak of ripeness, are packed with 236 milligrams of vitamin C per cup (more than double the amount found in oranges). And researchers at the University of Arizona say keeping vitamin C levels high cuts the length of time people struggle with nasty viral infections by almost 25 percent. The connection? Vitamin C strengthens the delicate tissues lining the nose and throat, preventing viruses from penetrating, plus it boosts the ability of immune cells to engulf and destroy germs.

Wellness Strategy #3: Dig Out Your Diary

Venting your fears and frustrations in a journal for 15 minutes daily for four days straight may actually reduce the number of times you get sick, say scientists at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. The theory goes that, because there's such a powerful connection between the mind and body, harboring stressful, negative feelings can actually dampen your immune system's ability to produce the white blood cells that fight infection. But releasing those feelings by journaling can help reduce stress. So find a time and place where you won't be disturbed, and start writing nonstop -- and don't worry about spelling or grammar.

Wellness Strategy #4: Move Your Muscles

Walking, weight lifting, dancing -- pick a workout you love and do it for 30 minutes daily. You could cut your risk of catching a cold by 50 percent, say researchers at Appalachian State University in North Carolina. "Regular exercise stimulates the brain to produce human growth hormone," explains Pamela Peeke, M.D., an assistant professor of medicine at the University of Maryland. "And this muscle-building chemical messenger simultaneously doubles your body's production of germ-fighting antibodies to make your white blood cells more aggressive when they encounter invaders. Even chunks of

exercise if you're super-busy -- 15 minutes here, 15 minutes there -- can work like a charm!"

Wellness Strategy #5: Gargle With Salt Water

Swishing around a little salt water can keep colds and flu at bay. In a recent study, Japanese scientists found mixing a half a teaspoon of salt into 8 ounces of warm water, then gargling for at least 10 seconds twice daily cut a person's risk of viral infections as much as 34 percent. Why? Water helps to flush out phlegm, which harbors bacteria, and naturally kills viruses before they can attach to cells and multiply, according to Mayo Clinic researchers.

Wellness Strategy #6: Pencil in Some Pal Time

Spending some quality time with your chums can actually slash your chances of developing a cold. Studies at Pennsylvania's Wilkes University suggest that people who have daily contact with friends are up to 75 percent less likely to develop viral infections. "Having great friends to chat with and rely on helps people feel positive and upbeat about life, and bounce back quickly from setbacks," explains Dr. Peeke, author of [Fit to Live](#). "And that cuts production of immunity-weakening stress hormones by as much as 25 percent." What's more, you don't have to plan pricey or elaborate girl getaways to reap these rewards. Just spending a few minutes each day reaching out to people who make you feel upbeat, whether it's by phone or e-mail, she says, can cut cortisol production for up to 24 hours.

Wellness Strategy #7: Steer Clear of Fried Foods

Anytime foods are deep fried, trans fats are produced and, in sufficient quantities, these unhealthy compounds can weaken your immune system and dull the body's response when viruses invade, says Michael Ozner, M.D., author of [The Miami Mediterranean Diet](#). Deep fried foods aren't the only culprits; other sources of trans fats include box cake mixes, canned frostings and store-bought pastries. To safeguard yourself, Ozner says, check food labels to ensure your pick doesn't contain trans fats. Common tip-off terms include partially hydrogenated oils, hydrogenated oils or vegetable shortening.

Wellness Strategy #8: Cut Back on Pain Meds

Experience some mild aches and pains? You may want to pass on pain relievers. When you take aspirin, ibuprofen or any other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAID), you're taking a drug designed to suppress white blood cells -- the very compounds responsible for attacking and destroying invading germs, says Katherine Sherif, M.D., director of the Center for Women's Health at Drexel University College of Medicine in Philadelphia. Her advice: During cold season, strive to steer clear of these products unless you truly need them.

Wellness Strategy #9: Try This Mind Trick

Strange but true: Simply spending 15 minutes daily visualizing your immune cells destroying sickness-causing bugs can actually rev up your production of these infection-fighters within 48 hours, say experts at the University of Illinois. “That’s because when you visualize your immune system becoming stronger, your brain actually produces the factors needed to make that happen,” explains Keith Deorio, M.D., medical director of The Deorio Wellness Medical Center in Santa Monica, Calif. Sit or lie down in a comfortable, quiet spot, then close your eyes and breathe slowly and deeply as you visualize your immune cells -- they look like tiny amoebas -- flowing through your bloodstream, gobbling up every virus they encounter.

Wellness Strategy #10: Take a Tea Break

Studies suggest that people produce three times more interferons, powerful proteins that attack and destroy viral invaders on contact, if they sip 20 ounces of black tea daily. Credit goes to unique tea antioxidants called alkylamine antigens. These compounds have been shown to rev up interferon production in as little as two weeks. To get the biggest health bang, bob your tea bag up and down for 15 seconds while you brew. Jiggled tea bags release up to twice as many antioxidants as bags that are left to steep untouched, say UCLA researchers.

Wellness Strategy #11: Suds. Suds and More Suds

When doctors at the U.S. Navy’s Great Lakes Recruit Training Command Center in Illinois ordered recruits to wash their hands with soap and water five times daily, the number of respiratory infections among recruits plunged 45 percent. “Viruses often get into your mouth and eyes by hitchhiking on your hands,” explains Herbert DuPont, M.D., chief of internal medicine at St. Luke’s Episcopal Hospital in Houston. “So keeping your hands squeaky-clean is one of the most important things you can do to protect against the flu.”

Wellness Strategy #12: Get Crafty

Spending just 20 minutes daily doing a soothing, stress-shredding activity like knitting, scrapbooking or painting can strengthen your immunity 76 percent, say experts at Stony Brook’s State University of New York. “That’s because your body’s ability to produce virus-fighting white blood cells and antibodies rises as soon as your stress hormone production drops,” explains Dr. Ozner.

Wellness Strategy #13: Veg Out

Enjoy half a cup of broccoli three to four times weekly and your white blood cells may recover the vigor they normally lose due to aging, say experts at UCLA. Sulforaphane, a chemical found in broccoli, switches on specific genes inside immune cells, explains lead researcher Andre Nel, M.D. “Once those genes are activated, immune cells function more efficiently, plus they’re able to shield themselves against attack by damaging compounds

called free radicals.” Not a fan of broccoli? Other solid sources of sulforaphane include brussels sprouts, cabbage and cauliflower.

Wellness Strategy #14: Down More D

Taking 1,000 to 2,000 International Units (IU) of vitamin D daily will rev up your immune system’s attack on invading viruses, reducing your risk of influenza 29 percent or more and cutting your risk of complications in half if you do fall ill, say Canadian researchers. That’s because vitamin D optimizes the growth of every cell in your body, including the immune cells you need to fight off invading viruses, explains Michael Holick, M.D., Ph.D., a professor of medicine at Boston University.

Wellness Strategy #15: Go for Garlic

It’s packed with over 70 different sulfur compounds, the raw materials needed to build fast, powerful virus-killing white blood cells, says William Sears, M.D., professor of pediatrics at the University of California, Irvine. “These sulfur compounds also help your body produce more antibodies, proteins that latch onto invaders, weighing them down so your immune cells can kill them more easily.” Just one clove of garlic daily can do the trick, boosting your ability to fight off flu viruses in as little as two weeks, say researchers at the State University of New York at Albany.

Wellness Strategy #16: Clean Hygiene

The best immediate defenses are washing your hands frequently, disinfecting cell phones, door handles, and office pens. Don’t forget getting plenty of rest and exercise, and sneezing or coughing in your sleeve. However, the best defense truly lies with building a strong immune system.

Wellness Strategy #17: Turn in Earlier

“Deep sleep is your body’s prime time for building infection-fighting antibodies,” says sleep researcher James B. Maas, Ph.D., a professor of psychology at Cornell University. “So being chronically tired doubles your risk of catching nasty infections and staying sick a long time when you do.” Fortunately, simply adding 30 to 60 minutes to your nightly slumber, or taking daily naps, can cut your risk of upper respiratory infections in half, plus cut your annual sick days 30 percent or more, say Cornell researchers.

Wellness Strategy #18: Break for Breakfast

Turns out, breakfast really is the most important meal of the day, especially if you’re surrounded by sickness. According to researchers at The Netherlands’ Maastricht University Medical Centre, breakfast eaters are half as likely to fall prey to viral infections. Experts say regular morning meals triple your body’s production of gamma interferon, a natural antiviral compound. And you don’t have to whip up anything fancy

to get this great protection. Experts say *any* a.m. meal will suffice, as long as you leave the table feeling full (study subjects enjoyed a moderate 600 to 1200 calorie breakfast).

Wellness Strategy #19: Mooch a Massage

Regular rubdowns have been shown to fire up levels of disease-fighting white blood cells as much as 25 percent. Researchers at Florida's University of Miami School of Medicine also say they can reduce production of immunity-weakening stress hormones. If a professional weekly treatment isn't in your budget, simply take a mere 10 minutes each day to massage your scalp, face and neck using slow, circular motions.

Wellness Strategy #20: Keep Your Hands off Your Face

This simple action can cut your risk of developing a bad cold or the flu by a whopping 47 percent, say researchers at Atlanta's Emory University. The secret: Most viruses get onto your body when you touch contaminated objects, but they can't get *into* your body (and cause illness) unless they can reach your nose, eyes and mouth. So keeping your fingers away from your face is like blocking off the only highway between two cities, says Charles Gerba, Ph.D., co-author of *The Germ Freak's Guide to Outwitting Colds and Flu*.