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TIPS TO PREVENT COLD AND FLU THE "NATURAL" WAY

Since there are no known cures for colds and flu, prevention must be your goal. A proactive approach to warding off colds and flu is apt to make your whole life healthier. The most effective way to prevent flu, frankly, is to get the flu shot. It may not be natural, but it works better than anything else. But there are other strategies you can employ as well.

WASH YOUR HANDS

Most cold and flu viruses are spread by direct contact. Someone who has the flu sneezes into their hand and then touches the telephone, the keyboard, a kitchen glass. The germs can live for hours, in some cases weeks, only to be picked up by the next person who touches the same object. So wash your hands often. If no sink is available, rub your hands together very hard for a minute or so. That also helps break up most of the cold germs.

DO NOT COVER YOUR SNEEZES AND COUGHS WITH YOUR HANDS

Because germs and viruses cling to your bare hands, muffling coughs and sneezes with your hands results in passing along your germs to others. When you feel a sneeze or cough coming, use a tissue, then throw it away immediately. If you do not have a tissue, turn your head away from people near you and cough into your arm or elbow area.

DO NOT TOUCH YOUR FACE

Cold and flu viruses enter your body through the eyes, nose or mouth. Touching their faces is the major way children catch colds, and a key way they pass colds on to their parents and others.

DRINK PLENTY OF FLUIDS

A typical, healthy adult needs eight 8-oz glasses of fluids each day. How can you tell if you are getting enough fluid? If the color of your urine runs close to clear, you are getting enough. If it is deep yellow, you need more fluids.

DO AEROBIC EXERCISE REGULARLY

Aerobic exercise speeds up the heart to pump larger quantities of blood; makes you breathe faster to help transfer oxygen from your lungs to your blood; and makes you sweat once your body heats up. These exercises help increase the body's natural virus-killing cells.

EAT YOGURT

Some studies have shown that eating a daily cup of low-fat yogurt can reduce your susceptibility to colds by 25%. Researchers think the beneficial bacteria in yogurt may stimulate production of immune system substances that fight disease.

DO NOT SMOKE

Statistics show that heavy smokers get more severe colds and more frequent ones. Even being around smoke profoundly zaps the immune system. Smoke dries out your nasal passages and paralyzes cilia. These are the delicate hairs that line the mucous membranes in your nose and lungs, and with their wavy movements they sweep cold and flu viruses out of the nasal passages. Experts contend that one cigarette can paralyze cilia for as long as 30 to 40 minutes.

CUT ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

Heavy alcohol use destroys the liver; the body's primary filtering system, which means that germs of all kinds will not leave your body as fast. The result is heavier drinkers are more prone to initial infections as well as secondary complications. Alcohol also dehydrates the body – it actually takes more fluids from your system than it puts in.

RELAX

If you can teach yourself to relax you can activate your immune system on demand. There is evidence that when you put your relaxation skills into action, your interleukins (leaders in the immune system response against cold and flu viruses) increase in the bloodstream. Train yourself to picture an image you find pleasant and calming. Do this 30 minutes a day for several months. Keep in mind relaxation is a learnable skill but is not doing nothing. People who try to relax but are in fact bored show no changes in blood chemicals.