

Winter 2000

# Well Now

U of O Health Center

## Don't get caught by a cold

by Tove Holmes

Most people get one or two common colds every year. What they should know is that these pesky energy-zappers are usually avoidable. If certain measures are taken, it is possible to stay healthy all year round.

There are a lot of myths surrounding this topic; it seems as though everyone has a suggestion for how best to treat a cold. The trouble is, there isn't a miracle cure of any kind, and the over-the-counter drugs available in the supermarket only battle the symptoms, and not the cause. In truth, little can be done about a cold except ride it out once the virus has taken root. A sensible way to ride out a cold is to get lots of rest, drink plenty of water and stay warm and comfortable. However, there are ways to prevent colds; the key is to take some simple steps before even being exposed to the germs.

The two most important ways to avoid getting sick is to maintain a healthy body through regular exercise, good nutrition and sufficient sleep, and to wash hands often, especially before eating. A healthy diet, which consists of balance, variety and moderation is very important in keeping a strong immune system. Also, regular exercise stimulates and invigorates the immune system. Registered nurses Sharon Harbert and Diane Yarabinec at the University Health Center agree that getting a sufficient amount of sleep is the best thing to do to avoid the common cold. When a body is healthy and well rested, the immune system will come to its natural defense.

Germs are spread through the air, but can appear in higher concentration on a person's hands. Since everything we touch is potentially covered with germs, it is important not to bring one's hands in contact with one's mouth, eyes or nose before cleansing thoroughly with soap and warm water. This is the method used by nurses and other health professionals when dealing with sick people, to prevent themselves from getting sick as well.

Some common myths that Sharon and Diane agreed are not necessarily true, are that a person should be kept warm, and that sugar is detrimental to the immune system. Eating too much sugar is bad for the body anyway, and should be avoided. As for keeping the body warm, staying within the comfort zone is all that is necessary. When the body is cold, extra energy must be spent to warm it back up, energy which could help fight off a cold.

Also important in the prevention and especially the treatment of the common cold is sufficient fluid replacement. Fluids flush out harmful impurities, and help in the production of mucus. The body uses more fluids than usual when fighting off a cold, which can leave it very dehydrated. Suggested in the "managing colds and the flu" pamphlet at the health center are water, juice, tea and soup. Hot beverages are soothing for the throat and can help with decongestion. Also recommended is gargling with salt water, and inhaling moist air. Smoking irritates the mucus membranes, and can lead to complications such as pneumonia or bronchitis. Ingesting zinc

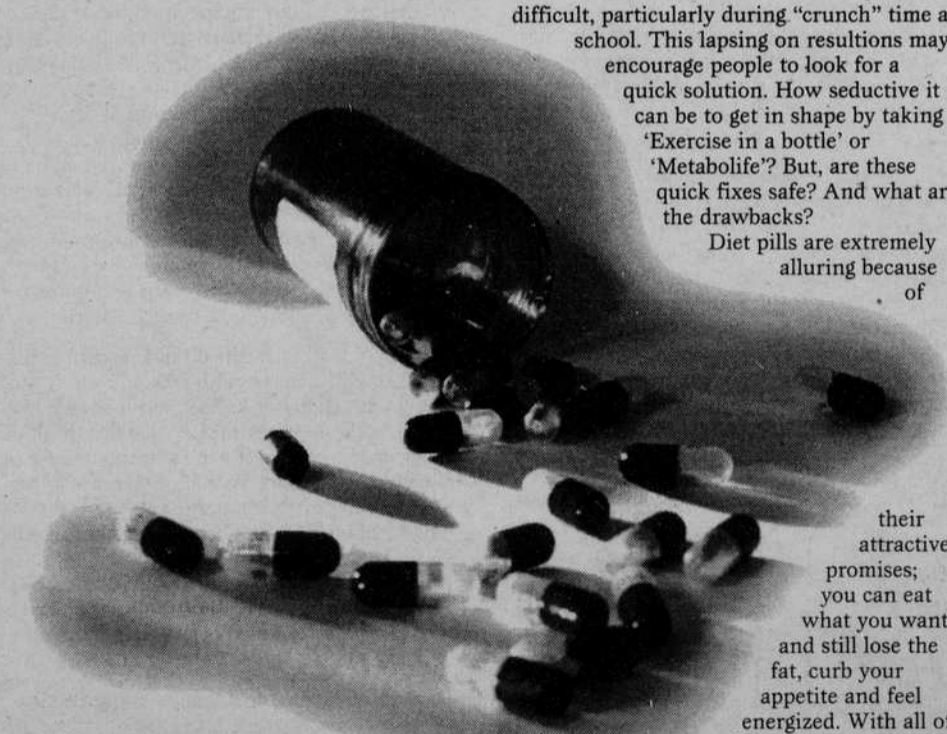
lozenges and 500-1000 mg of vitamin C a day may also boost the immune system. These are available at low cost to students at the Health Center pharmacy.

If you do get sick this winter there are some resources available at the health center to help you out. Along with the doctors and nurses there is also a pharmacy, which carries over-the-counter remedies such as Tylenol and cough syrup, as well as alternative remedies such as Echinacea. Also, the nurses in areas A, B and C hand out a "Duck Care Cold kit", containing chicken soup, Tylenol, herbal tea, cough drops, a thermometer, a symptoms checklist and an informational pamphlet.

### Checklist for avoiding a cold

- Wash hands before eating or touching your face
- Get plenty of sleep (7-9 hrs)
- Drink lots of fluids (water, juice, herbal tea)
- Maintain a healthy diet
- Get plenty of exercise
- Keep a positive attitude

## A Quick Fix — The Diet Pill Rut



by Tara Payne

It's that time of year again. Time to make your New Years Resolutions. Before you tune out, consider on how many occasions you've made a list of resolutions, only to forget them come mid-January? Chances are, you've done it before. The resolution that seems to top of everyone's list each year is to lose weight and tone up. However, most of us may find getting motivated to go to the gym every other day

difficult, particularly during "crunch" time at school. This lapsing on resolutions may encourage people to look for a quick solution. How seductive it can be to get in shape by taking 'Exercise in a bottle' or 'Metabolife'? But, are these quick fixes safe? And what are the drawbacks?

Diet pills are extremely alluring because of

their attractive promises; you can eat what you want and still lose the fat, curb your appetite and feel energized. With all of these promises, who wouldn't want to try them?

However, before you start popping these pills, be sure to look at their ingredients to understand the risk involved with taking them. One of the most common ingredients is, ma-huang, a naturally occurring ephedrine. In ancient times, Chinese doctors used ephedrine for upper respiratory problems, such as bronchitis. But in recent years, ma-huang, combined with a combination of caf-

feine and natural herbs, have been used for weight loss. It can be successful for some people. For instance, many people will experience positive results from using ephedrine, such as weight loss and a suppressed appetite. "It stimulates your nervous system" and "is a useful product if properly used," says Varro Tyler, a professor of pharmacognosy at Purdue University.

However, there are some risks. People who take ma-huang and do not seek medical supervision may not know about the adverse reactions to these drugs. So far, 15 deaths in this country alone have been associated with ephedra or other herbal stimulants. Because ephedra works as an "upper," it boosts the heart rate, constricts blood vessels, and increases blood pressure, which can lead to a stroke. Other adverse effects of ma-huang include heart palpitations, arrhythmia's, and memory loss.

As always, the best way to lose weight and stay fit is through a regimen of regular exercise and a healthy diet. For long term overall health and well being, this is the safest route to pursue. The University Health Center offers a healthy eating workshop, where students can learn how to cook delicious, nutritious, meals. The peer health education office keeps a wide range of weight management and exercise books for students to check out. Kristen Olmos, the health center's nutritionist, can help you plan an individual eating guide. Also, the new Rec center has a wide range of athletic activities.

Whatever your New Years Resolutions are, be sensible. And remember, you have a variety of University contacts at your fingertips that can help you keep those New Year's Resolutions. Good luck!

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