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Parents Page

15 Ways to Keep You and Your Family Healthy This Winter

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<https://www.parents.com/>

Whether you're worried about COVID-19, the common cold, or the flu, these expert-backed tips will help you build a stronger immune system and (hopefully!) stay symptom-free throughout the colder months.

Stay Healthy Tips for Winter

This winter, as the COVID-19 pandemic continues across the globe, staying healthy (and keeping your immune system in tip-top shape) is of paramount importance. You're likely already doing much of what you can to keep viruses, bacteria, and infections at bay: handwashing, physical distancing, wearing a mask, and keeping up with your healthy diet and exercise routine.



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Wear a Mask

To slow the spread of COVID-19, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends mask-wearing when you're out in public, at events or gatherings, or pretty much anywhere where you're going to be around others who don't live in your household. (Be sure to stay up to date on mask guidelines where you live, too!) Make sure to wear your mask over your nose and mouth and help any children 2 or older wear theirs, too.

Practice Social Distancing

No one wants to be in close quarters with someone who's sick but this year, it's particularly important to keep your distance and avoid close contact with people who are sick. That's why the CDC recommends maintaining 6 feet between yourself and those who don't live in your household (and 6 feet between you and anyone who is sick). That's about two arms'-lengths from others.

Wash Our Hands

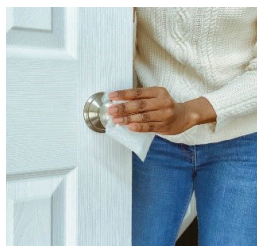
To protect yourself and others from disease, the CDC recommends washing your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds—especially after being out in public, blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. Teach your kids to do the same, suggests Maritza Baez, M.D., a family physician in Buffalo, New York. Nothing fancy is required. Simply do this: "Work up a lather and wash before eating and after you go to the bathroom," she says. Wash under your fingernails, too. That's where germs lurk.



CREDIT: RADIUS IMAGES/GETTY

Be A Clean Freak

The virus that causes COVID-19, SARS-CoV-2, can linger on surfaces. So can the flu virus. That's why it's important to clean and disinfect frequently-touched surfaces (things like tables, doorknobs, and countertops) every day. Most EPA-registered household disinfectants will do the trick just fine, per the CDC.



CREDIT: GETTY IMAGES

Get Your Flu Shot

It's smart for families to get annual flu shots (even smarter this year!), but they are especially important for expectant mothers and new moms, says Amy Herold, M.D., an OB-GYN in Napa, California. "They protect mom from getting the flu, and they pass [protective] antibodies to the baby. Antibodies are also passed through breast milk." Dr. Herold also recommends that moms and families get vaccinated for whooping cough.



CREDIT: ISTOCK

Stock Up on Toothbrushes

Use a new toothbrush after you've had a cold, the flu, a mouth infection, or sore throat. Germs can hide in your toothbrush and lead to reinfection. (Yuck!)

Brighten Up Your Days

About 3 percent of Americans suffer from seasonal affective disorder (SAD), a malady of mood swings that occurs when light diminishes in winter. To counter SAD, Jeffrey Sumer, MA, CPC, a psychotherapist practicing in Chicago, recommends vitamin D, exercise, and light therapy. Some lamps and box lights are designed to treat the disorder. Ask your doctor to recommend one if you think you have SAD. To keep your kids upbeat, help them get off the couch and outside on sunny days. About 10 to 15 minutes of play in the sun is a good mood-lifter (and source of D).



CREDIT: FANCY PHOTOGRAPHY/VEER

Stay Hydrated

You may not feel as thirsty in cold weather, but that can up your risk for dehydration. Water helps your body keep a normal temperature, lubricate and cushion your joints, and get rid of waste, per the CDC. Without enough of it, you start dragging. Aim for about 11.5 cups of fluids a day for women and 15.5 cups a day for men.



CREDIT: BLEND IMAGES/VEER

Pamper Your Skin

Skin takes a beating in winter. To keep it healthy, dermatologist Brooke Jackson, M.D., founder of Skin Wellness Dermatology Associates in Durham, North Carolina suggests increasing the humidity in your home by adjusting the gauge on your furnace or placing a humidifier in each bedroom. Aim for a humidity level between 40 and 50 percent. Lavishly moisturize after a brief shower (long ones dry you out more) using jarred, not pump, moisturizers. (Pump lotions contain more water.) And don't skip the sunscreen—winter sun can glare, especially off of the snow.

Fill Up on Fiber

Research suggests that the fiber in foods like oats, apples, and nuts could reduce inflammation and strengthens the immune system by increasing anti-inflammatory proteins. The suggested daily fiber intake for an adult woman is 25 grams a day. An apple with the skin on it has about 4.5 grams of fiber.



Eat More Mushrooms

"Include lots of mushrooms, especially shiitakes, in your cooking," says registered dietitian Jill Nussinow, R.D., author of The Veggie Queen. One University of Florida study found increased immunity in people who ate a cooked shiitake mushroom every day for a month.

Chill Out

Stress can cause illness for two main reasons," explains Elizabeth R. Lombardo, Ph.D., P.T., author of A Happy You: "Our immune system does not function well when we are stressed. And we are more likely to engage in unhealthy habits such as 'Ben and Jerry's' therapy."

Rinse Your Nose

Although nasal irrigation sounds gross, studies have shown it to be an effective complementary therapy for allergies and sinus infections. Try rinsing with a Neti pot or a nose dropper, using a saline solution of 1 cup water, 1/4 teaspoon salt, and 1/4 teaspoon soda. Pour or squirt some of the mixture in one nostril, while holding the other nostril shut. Repeat on the other side and blow your now healthier nose. Older children can be taught to use a Neti pot, too, but ask your pediatrician before starting the therapy.

Keep Moving

Just because you can't go to the gym doesn't mean you can't move. Get your workout by shoveling snow, suggests, founder, and CEO of Kettlebell Kickboxing in New York: "It burns calories and activates your lower and upper body muscles." An hour of shoveling burns a whopping 400 calories. Or try something like a family yoga class (on YouTube or through a different program) to get the whole family involved.

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