



## 11 Best Ways to Stop a Cold Before It Even Starts, According to Doctors

<https://www.womenshealthmag.com/health/a35066552/how-to-prevent-a-cold/>

From proper hand washing to getting enough sleep, here's how you can avoid getting sick.

**W**hen a cold takes over your body, it can seem like you're at the mercy of the virus when it comes to how long it will last. "The common cold is a viral infection of your throat and nose, also known as your upper respiratory tract. Many types of viruses can cause the common cold, but the most common culprit is rhinovirus," says Adiba Khan, M.D., a family physician at Northwestern Medicine Lake Forest Hospital.

A runny nose, sore throat, cough, congestion, mild body aches and headaches, sneezing, and a low-grade fever can leave you feeling exhausted before your symptoms start to clear up. Not to mention, a cold can feel a lot like COVID-19, the respiratory illness caused by the novel coronavirus.

But a true cold is typically harmless, even though it can take up to two weeks to start feeling better, explains Deborah S. Clements, M.D., a family physician at Northwestern Medicine Lake Forest Hospital.

The best thing you can do to feel healthy during the colder months? Stop a cold from taking over your body in the first place. In fact, there are a bevy of ways you can prevent colds and shorten their length. Here's exactly what you can do to fight them off all season long, so you can save those sick days for something more fun.

### 1. Crank up the humidifier.



Low humidity dries out your nasal passages, making it harder to trap and eliminate the micro-bugs that settle in your sinuses, eventually leading to a cold. The fix? Invest in a humidifier and keep it running when the air starts to feel dry.

"A humidifier may help to keep the mucous membranes moist. Dry mucous membranes in the nose inhibit your body's ability to trap germs as they enter your system," says Amber Tully, M.D., a family medicine physician at the Cleveland Clinic.

But make sure you keep your humidifier clean, as the warm moist environment can become a breeding ground for mold (which can also cause cold-like symptoms if you're allergic to it).

### 2. Load up on vitamin D.



Research shows that people who don't get enough vitamin D are much more likely to suffer from an upper respiratory infection—causing a cough, scratchy throat, or stuffy nose—than those who load up on the sunshine vitamin, potentially because your cells depend on D to activate their immune responses. "Some studies have shown that supplementing with 400 international units of vitamin D per day may prevent respiratory infections," says Dr. Khan.

Currently, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) suggest that most adults aim for at least 600 IUs per day, but some organizations recommend much more than that. Getting enough vitamin D through your diet alone is tough (you can find it in foods like salmon, beef, egg yolks, fortified milk and orange juice, cheese, and mushrooms), so if you suspect you're low, talk to your doctor about finding a supplement that works for you and your needs.

### 3. Keep your hands clean—and away from eyes, nose, or mouth.



Even if you don't notice it, you likely touch your face a lot. In fact, one small 2008 study found that the participants touched their face an average 16 times

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## 8 Houseplants To Grow That Can Dramatically Improve Your Health

<https://www.lifehack.org/363824/8-houseplants-grow-that-can-dramatically-improve-your-health>

Anyone who's ever shopped around for houseplants would probably admit to prioritizing the way they look and what their maintenance requirements are before deciding on one to bring home. Those are obvious things to keep in mind, but there's one more important aspect we sometimes tend to forget about when looking for an ideal houseplant: their health benefits.

Good health depends on more than just diet and exercise. Without a doubt your environment affects your health too, and the right houseplant can actually make a big difference in your mood, your stress level, your sleep quality and even your breathing.

A nice looking plant is great, but a nice looking plant that quietly works its magic in the background on your health as you go about your regular routine is even better. Here are eight houseplants that can help solve a few common health-related problems.

**Spider Plant:** In addition to formaldehyde, snake plants target carbon monoxide and other toxic air impurities as well.

**Aloe Vera:** According to WebMD, people typically use it to help treat burns, sunburn, frostbite, psoriasis and cold sores. Make sure you speak to your doctor first in case you have any allergies.

**Lavender:** Lavender is a flowering plant that has a very gentle and pleasant aroma. Best known for its stress-relieving mental benefits, the scent of lavender is often used in spa products like bath salts, skincare creams, soaps and candles.

**English Ivy:** Nobody ever wants to think about the possibility of mold thriving in their home. If you're worried about it, bringing an English ivy plant into your home can help you rest easy since it's well-known to purify up to 94 percent of airborne mold particles that can trigger allergies.

**Snake Plant:** Another great houseplant for the bedroom, the snake plant is among one of the most popular choices for improving indoor air quality. It actually gets most of its job done at night, converting carbon dioxide into oxygen as you sleep.

**Rosemary:** The memory-boosting component of rosemary is thought to be caused by a compound called 1,8-cineole, which may cause increases in a neurotransmitter called acetylcholine. Although you may be able to take advantage of a more potent scent by using rosemary essential oil with a diffuser in your home, it doesn't hurt to keep a rosemary plant nearby in places like your home office or any other room where you could use a mental boost.

**Peace Lily:** Peace lilies will really compliment your home decor in the summer when their beautiful white flowers are in full bloom, but that's not all that they can do. This pretty and powerful houseplant is a master of air pollutant removal – working hard to absorb ammonia, benzene, xylene, formaldehyde and trichloroethylene throughout your home.

**Boston Fern:** If you live in a location where humidity tends to be a problem, the Boston fern may be the most ideal houseplant to bring into your home. Said to be a natural humidifier, Boston ferns are among the best air purifying plants that also combat formaldehyde, xylene and other unwanted toxins.



## JUMBLE

Unscramble these Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form ordinary words.

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Arrange the circled letters to form the bonus answer, as suggested by the caption in the cartoon

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ANSWERS ON LAST PAGE



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per hour. That's a major no-no during cold and flu season: When you come in contact with a virus—through another person or an infected surface—it can enter your system if your hands aren't properly cleaned, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). "Viruses also spread by skin-to-skin contact, such as a handshake," says Dr. Clements.

So, maintain a hands-off policy. "This prevents germs on your hands being transferred into your mucous membrane (nose and mouth) and getting you sick," says Dr. Tully.

While you're at it, make sure you're washing your hands the right way. Use soap and scrub for at least 20 seconds (get between your fingers and underneath your nails!), says the CDC. Opt for hand sanitizer (like these travel-size bottles from Purell) if you're in a pinch.

#### 4. Disinfect your phone.

Think of all the places you put your phone down during the day: the kitchen counter, a bathroom stall, your restaurant table—talk about a germ-fest.

In fact, a 2012 University of Arizona study found that cell phones may carry 10 times the amount of bacteria than toilet seats.

To disinfect your devices, Apple suggests using a Lysol or Clorox disinfecting wipe. Just be sure to shut down your phone, squeeze out any excess liquid (you don't want a pool of the stuff sitting on your screen), and dry it off with a soft lint-free cloth. Keep in mind that while bleach is great for banishing viruses, products containing the substance might damage your phone. If you have a hard time finding cleaning wipes near you, follow this guide on how to disinfect your phone using rubbing alcohol.

#### 5. Find some time to relax.

Feeling on edge? Feeling run-down can actually pave the way for a cold, since stress causes your body to pump out excess cortisol, a hormone that can weaken your immune system's ability to fight infection, says Dr. Tully.

So make winding down a priority: Take up yoga, try meditation, go for a daily stroll through nature, or prioritize some time after work to make dinner with your family—anything that helps you shake off a long day will help.

#### 6. Get plenty of sleep.

A good snooze is key when it comes to preventing colds. In one *JAMA Internal Medicine* study, researchers gave 153 healthy men and women nasal drops containing rhinovirus and tracked their sleep habits. They found that

people who regularly got less than seven hours of sleep were three times more likely to come down with a cold than those who slept eight hours or more each night. The National Sleep Foundation recommends aiming for at least 7 to 9 hours per night.

#### 7. Reach for zinc.

Research suggests that zinc can actually decrease the growth of viruses, says Dr. Clements. Plus, taking zinc (typically in the form of zinc lozenges or zinc gluconate nasal sprays) seems to reduce the duration and severity of symptoms right after they come on, according to the NIH.

"Although the proper dosing is unclear at this time, studies have shown a benefit only at daily doses greater than 75 milligrams," says Dr. Clements. The NIH suggests most adults need much less than that to meet their daily needs, so just go for foods rich in zinc, rather than a supplement (unless you talk to your doc about it first). Meat, tofu, oysters, and lentils are all great sources of the mineral.

#### 8. Label your drinking glass.

"When a family member has a cold, try to use disposable glasses or label glasses. This can help to prevent accidental spread of the virus," says Dr. Khan. And be extra careful when it comes to sharing objects that can get contaminated by a family member who is sick, especially amid COVID-19, such as telephones, towels, or utensils.

#### 9. Power up with probiotics.

Not all bacteria are bad—the good kind of bugs in your gut, found in probiotic foods like yogurt, sauerkraut, and kombucha, might help support your immune system. After all, a large portion of your immune system can be found right in your gastrointestinal (GI) tract.

One 2014 study published in the *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport* actually found that rugby players who took a probiotic supplement experienced far fewer colds and GI infections than those who popped a placebo.

More research needs to be done to confirm that probiotics can truly keep viruses away, but studies suggest that the good bugs seem to be beneficial when symptoms hit, too. For instance, in a study published in the *British Journal of Nutrition*, researchers found that even though college students taking probiotics or a placebo caught colds at a similar rate, those taking probiotics experienced less intense symptoms (like a stuffy nose or sore throat) for a shorter amount of time.

#### 10. Wear a face mask.

You should be doing this anyway, per recommendations from the CDC. Wearing a face mask is one of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19, as well as other respiratory infections like a cold. Not only does it protect those around you, but research shows that a face mask helps protect the wearer, too.

Viruses, including those that cause a cold, flu, or COVID-19, typically spread from an infected person to others through the air after a cough or sneeze. When everyone wears a mask, we protect one another from our potentially infected respiratory droplets.

What's more, "studies demonstrate that cloth mask materials can also reduce wearers' exposure to infectious droplets through filtration, including filtration of fine droplets and particles less than 10 microns," a research brief from the CDC states, noting that "multiple layers of cloth with higher thread counts have demonstrated superior performance compared to single layers of cloth with lower thread counts."

#### 11. Get the flu vaccine.

While the cold and flu are caused by very different viruses, they can feel awfully similar when it comes to symptoms. However, the flu will hit you harder and can have risky complications, especially if you already have a weakened immune system. The best thing you can do to protect yourself is to get the flu shot every year, since the circulating viruses constantly change. The CDC recommends getting the flu shot (or nasal spray) as soon as the vaccine is available, ideally before October.

The bottom line: Prevention really is the best medicine.

But don't freak out if you do get sick—most adults get at least one or two colds every year. Just keep an eye on how long it lasts: "If you're having high fevers or persistent symptoms, be sure to see your doctor to make sure that nothing else is going on," says Dr. Clements.

After all, it's more important than ever to get tested for COVID-19 if you think you may have been exposed to the virus. If you do happen to have a confirmed case of coronavirus rather than a cold, your doctor will guide you on next best steps depending on the severity of your symptoms.

ANSWERS TO JUMBLE:

GROUP; NINTH; MATURE; ODDITY

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