

HOW TO

STAY HEALTHY & FIT DURING THE WINTER SEASON



WASH YOUR HANDS

Washing your hands regularly, and particularly before you touch your face or eat, is one of the most constructive and effective ways to avoid getting sick. Today's preschoolers have it right - they are often encouraged to wash their hands each time they enter the classroom, after using the restroom, and before snack time. Interestingly, just teaching others about healthy hand washing practices has been shown to have a positive impact on the spread of communicable diseases. The CDC reports that hand washing education reduces respiratory illnesses, like colds, in the general population by 16-21 percent.

EAT NUTRITIOUS FOOD

While cold weather breeds the desire for comfort food as much as colds and flu, your body craves more. Fruits and vegetables give your body the fuel it needs to fight the viruses and bacteria that are more likely to attack your body in winter. Keep your diet balanced, and don't forget to throw in some immune-boosting dairy to ensure you're at your peak.

GET ENOUGH SLEEP

Sleep is when our bodies restore and rebuild. So, it follows logic that if we aren't getting enough sleep, we aren't giving our bodies a chance to properly fight off infection. Studies have shown that well-rested people who get the flu vaccine developed stronger protection against the illness. Fight the urge to binge watch your favorite show this winter and prioritize sleep instead.

EAT RIGHT AND EXERCISE

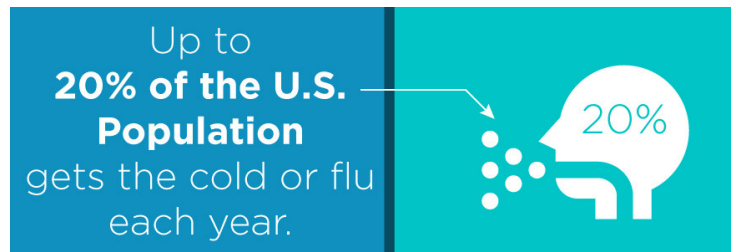
Though it is easy to skip workouts in dark cold weather, or to snuggle on the couch with a less-than-healthy snack after a long day, letting healthy nutrition and exercise habits slide at the end of the year leads to weakened immune systems. Eating overly sugary foods has been shown to impact your immune response for hours afterwards. When it comes to staying healthy, exercise actually has two benefits. In and of itself, exercise has been shown to fortify your immune defenses. But exercise has also been shown to lower stress, and sky-high stress levels also make it more difficult for us to ward off infection.

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MAINTAINING PROPER DIET AND EXERCISE ROUTINES IS ALSO NECESSARY TO WARD OFF ILLNESS. IT IS ESTIMATED THAT UP TO 20% OF THE UNITED STATES POPULATION GETS THE COLD OR FLU EACH YEAR. WINTERTIME PRESENTS A HIGHER LIKELIHOOD TO DEVELOP COLD AND FLU THAN DURING ANY OTHER SEASON. HERE ARE SOME WINTER DIET AND EXERCISE TIPS TO SHOW YOU HOW TO STAY HEALTHY AND FIT DURING WINTER'S COLDER MONTHS:



1. Calm Your Carb Cravings. The cold season tends to ignite our cravings for more carbs and comfort foods. Why? After you consume these delicious treats, your serotonin levels rise, making your brain think you are happier. And as the day wears on, your carb cravings get stronger and stronger. To counter this, try eating a protein-packed breakfast to keep your energy levels up throughout the day. If by the time the afternoon rolls around you're still craving sweets or carbs, be sure to have low-fat and healthy snacks on hand. However, if you can, finding a way to increase your serotonin levels without food is the best way to beat the carb cravings.

2. Add Omega 3 Fatty Acids. Omega 3 fatty acids are a healthy type of fat that are naturally found in many food types including fish, plant seeds and nuts. Omega 3 fatty acids are great for reducing joint pain and stiffness as they are a natural anti-inflammatory. Studies have also shown that omega 3 fatty acids help lower levels of depression, which people commonly feel during the shorter days of winter.

3. Cook With Mushrooms. There are several species of mushrooms that have immune-boosting health benefits. That's because mushrooms have naturally-occurring antibiotics. This gives them medicinal properties, which helps us to fight off many types of illnesses. Next time you're at the grocery store, be sure to stock up on varieties like white button or shitake mushrooms and add them to your meals this winter.

4. Eat More Fiber. Soluble fiber found in apples, oats and nuts is an important way to decrease inflammation and boost immune system function. Soluble fiber also helps reduce cholesterol levels in the body and aids in weight loss and protection against diabetes. This is an especially important winter health tip for seniors who require a high-fiber diet to protect their digestive systems.

5. Eat More Green and Orange Vegetables. Sticking primarily to vegetables and fruits that are dark green and orange is important in ensuring you're getting healthy nutrients, sugars and fats. Spinach, kale, Swiss chard, squash, carrots and oranges are all delicious during the winter. There are plenty of recipes available to incorporate these items into your regular winter diet.

6. Cook With Spices. Onions, garlic, ginger and cilantro are the perfect items to add flavor to your dishes. Not only do they make food taste great, but they're also shown to help improve immune function. Turmeric is a spice traditionally used in Chinese and Indian medicine. Its main active ingredient is called curcumin, which gives curry its yellow color. This spice helps to combat a number of conditions including inflammation and heart disease, and it acts as a powerful antioxidant.