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## Weathering Cough, Cold, and Crud Season

By Debbie DeAngelo  
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Ready or not – here it comes. The start of germapalooza.

On average, adults catch two to four colds a year, while young children come in at about six to 10. Add a dash of flu, pneumonia, Covid, RSV, and stomach bugs, and you have the microbial merry-go-round for a miserable winter.

Although this seasonal circus comes to town annually, many people are caught off guard. Certainly no one likes to think about becoming sick and being laid up feeling feverish, achy, and stuffy, but to deny the likelihood of succumbing periodically isn't sensible.

**Prevention & Preparation**

Aside from frequent handwashing and practicing health courtesies, there are several steps we can take to weather the winter months in as healthy of a manner as possible. Here are some commonly overlooked ways to enjoy winter wellness.

**Fortify your immunity.** Once your resistance is low, your chances of becoming ill escalate. My personal motto leaps to mind here: “Eat right. Sleep tight. Move more. Stress less.” It’s actually a simple solution ... just not always easy.

Eat at least one cup of produce at each meal. Fruits and vegetables are two of the most potent weapons against disease that nature provides. They are chock full of antioxidants and anti-inflammatory substances; both of which are the cornerstones of combatting infections. Add a variety of fortifying herbs and spices to your meals too. Germ-fighting examples are turmeric, garlic, basil, and ginger. Wash it down with a few cups of white or green tea each day.

Don’t overlook the power of sleep. It’s the most underrated and devalued aspect of battling infections. After only one night of inadequate rest, your immune system is rendered less efficient. Be sure to turn in early.

People who lead a moderately energetic lifestyle have demonstrated a lower tendency of contracting infections during cold and flu season. Some studies have shown a risk reduction as high as 50 percent. When the physically fit did catch a cold or another virus, their symptoms weren’t as severe.

Chronic stress doesn’t do a body good. As with nutrition, sleep, and exercise, we don’t really need research studies to convince us of that. We just have to make the time to do it. Identify your stress triggers and minimize them where you can. Have a plan for dealing with the ones you can’t. And be sure there’s some fun in your life. Laughter is the best medicine.

**Assemble a care kit.** Fever, sinus congestion, cough, sore throat, nausea, and diarrhea are common viral symptoms. Inventory your medicine cabinet and replenish it with remedies and medicines for these complaints. If you frequently get cold sores, be sure to have medicine on hand so you can use it at the first sign of an outbreak. Remember to check that you have a working thermometer, a humidifier that’s clean and ready to go, a supply of face masks and disposable vinyl gloves, and covid tests.

The same preparation holds true for stocking your pantry and freezer. Think about some of the foods and beverages you can have readily available when an infection strikes suddenly, so you don’t have to do it while ill. Good choices include soup, bone broth or homemade stock, fresh garlic, electrolyte replacement powders, and beverages, tea, Greek yogurt, eggs, popsicles made from whole fruit, toast, oranges, and bananas.

**Take care at the doctor's office.** Wisdom dictates that to prevent getting sick we should avoid being around sick people. The doctor's office is full of sick patients – and their germs. Coughing, sneezing, feverish people file in and out of the waiting room and touch the same items that you touch. Perhaps the best idea is to plan ahead. Strive to schedule routine or non-essential care outside of cold and flu season to minimize your exposure. To avoid feeling sicker after leaving the office than before you went in, it's essential to follow sensible precautions.

Beware of shared surfaces. Primary culprits include pens, electronic registration stations, door handles, elevator buttons, and magazines. Use your own pen, apply hand sanitizer after signing in at the computer kiosk, and bring your own reading material.

Try not to sit near those with obvious signs of illness. Observe which people are blowing their nose, coughing, sneezing, and generally looking miserable. Grab the first few appointments of the day when the waiting and exam rooms are at their most pristine. If you're taking children with you, bring their own toys. Office toys get cleaned regularly but not after every child plays with them.

Keep your hands away from your face, refrain from biting your nails, and don't eat while waiting. This is how most germs enter your body. Wash your hands with soap and water prior to leaving the office. Scrub for at least 20 seconds, the length of time it takes to eliminate germs.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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