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# STOP SNIFFLING!

*It's a sick crime that our longest season (November to April) is cold-and-flu season – and those days are upon us. But we've brought in some help: Our squad of experts will show you what to do if you're already dipping below the weather and the best ways to trounce the dreaded bugs before they bite.* by Jen O'Brien



# Where the bugs are

Even if you've escaped nasty bugs so far this year, you're still probably surrounded by snifflers and coughers. Here's how to keep yourself healthy anywhere you go.

**1** On the treadmill at the gym, you're jolted out of your aerobic trance when the guy beside you howls "Achooo," sending a visible spray of germy droplets into the air.

**Sick factor:** ●●●

**How to avert the crisis:** Germs can travel three or more feet in the air, so step away from obvious sickies to avoid inhaling their bugs. If you can't get away, avoid ushering the bugs into your body by "keeping your hands away from your eyes or nose whenever you're out in public," advises Joanne Langley, an infectious-disease specialist at IWK Health Centre in Halifax.

**3** You innocently took money out of the bank machine, not thinking about the germs that could be hiding on the keypad.

**Sick factor:** ●●●

**How to avert the crisis:** It's true that flu germs can survive up to 48 hours after the virus lands on a hard surface such as a handrail or the buttons of an ATM. But the good news is that preventing that virus from entering your body is often as easy as washing your hands. "It's one of the best preventive measures there are," says MacDonald. Scrub your hands with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds numerous times throughout the day, especially before you eat and after you've spent time in a public place. And carry hand wipes or hand-sanitizer gel with you for those times when you can't get to soap and water soon enough.



PHOTOGRAPHS: TOP, JUPITERIMAGES; BOTTOM, MASTERFILE



**2** At work, you're virtually surrounded by hacking heaps of germs, otherwise known as the co-workers you spend eight hours a day with.

**Sick factor:** ●●●

**How to avert the crisis:** Workplaces can be hazardous, especially if your co-workers are volleying a flu bug around. The best way to ensure that you won't get sick is to get the flu shot, which is typically offered by family doctors and health clinics (and some workplaces) starting in October and costs \$10 to \$15 in most provinces. If you're pregnant, you should still get vaccinated. "No matter what trimester you're in, the flu shot will protect you and offer a measure of protection to your newborn," says Judy MacDonald, the deputy medical officer for the Calgary Health Region.



**4** Your pack-a-day habit is the only thing that's helping you get through a stressful period at work.

**Sick factor:** ●●●●

**How to avert the crisis:** If you're not ready to quit, at least cut back. "Cigarette smoke damages the lining of your airway, so it can't perform its normal function of getting rid of invading bacteria," explains Langley. "And that makes you more prone to infection." For an extra immune-system (and stress-relieving) boost, try a 20-minute workout instead of a cigarette break. Running regularly, in particular, has been linked with fewer colds.

**5** You've got a finicky toddler, or maybe just a finicky work schedule. Whatever the reason, you haven't been getting your usual amount of shut-eye and you're feeling extra fatigued.

**Sick factor:** ●●●●

**How to avert the crisis:** Skimping on sleep deals a huge blow to your immune system, which will compromise your health no matter the season. During this infectious time of year, pay close attention to your sleep schedule to ensure you're getting eight hours every night. Supplement with naps and lazy Sunday mornings as required.

*The average cold lets up after a week. But the flu is almost twice as bad: You can suffer symptoms for seven days and may need another seven to recover.*



RECIPE

## Super-easy chicken soup

You make the chicken soup when your family's sick, but who makes it for you? Let our test kitchen help with this quick recipe that you can make no matter how subhuman you feel.

- Heat a container of chicken broth in a large saucepan.
- Add sliced skinless boneless chicken breasts.
- Break fettuccine into bite-size pieces and add along with generous pinches of dried thyme or tarragon. Some grated ginger or hot chillies can add a little kick.
- Cover and simmer about 15 minutes. Stir often.

## Cold-and-flu survival kit

Don't leave home without these purse-sized rescuers.



**Extra-Strength Tylenol Flu Daytime Tablets:** Fevers and aches should dissipate soon after you've taken these non-drowsy pills. (Save the nighttime tablets for a restful sleep.)

**Purell Instant Hand Sanitizer:**

This germ-killer isn't antibacterial, so it won't give rise to superbugs. Carry the purse-sized bottle with you. Use often.



**Fisherman's Friend lozenges:**

You'll be thankful for these lozenges regardless of whether you're sneezing or coughing: The concentrated menthol will desensitize a sore throat, and its vapours will temporarily clear your nasal passages.



PHOTOGRAPHS: TOP LEFT, JERZYWORKS/MASTERFILE; TOP RIGHT, JUPITERIMAGES; COLD-AND-FLU, SHANNON ROSS

# Name that illness

Is it a cold, the flu – or an infection worthy of dragging your sorry self to the doctor? Here’s how to tell the difference.



Symptom	What’s wrong?	What do I do about it?
<b>Runny nose</b>	Likely just a cold.	Rest and drink plenty of fluids to boost your immune system.
<b>Dry cough</b>	Could be a cold or flu.	“A cough is a defence mechanism,” says the Halifax-based infectious-disease specialist Joanne Langley. “It gets rid of the germs in your throat and lower lungs.” Rest and drink fluids.
<b>Sore throat</b>	Could be strep throat, especially if you don’t have a runny nose or other cold symptoms.	If it’s strep throat, which is usually accompanied by swollen glands and a fever, you’ll need antibiotics prescribed by your doctor.
<b>Fever</b>	A fever of 39 to 40 degrees Celsius is a sure sign of the flu.	Rest and drink fluids. If your fever lasts for more than 48 hours or you have a severe cough and pain when you breathe, see your doctor to rule out pneumonia.
<b>Aches and pains</b>	Common symptoms of the flu.	Rest and drink fluids. If the symptoms worsen, call your doctor.
<b>Phlegmy cough</b>	Likely just a cold.	Clear or white phlegm is almost certainly a cold or the flu, but if it’s yellow, green or brown, you may need a prescription for antibiotics.
<b>Fatigue</b>	Likely the flu, if you’re sleeping eight hours a night and you’re not dehydrated.	Your body may be tired because it’s fighting off a virus. Rest and drink fluids. If you’re still tired after two weeks, call your doctor.

## The great defenders

**Three foods that’ll keep colds and flu at bay.**



**PROBIOTIC YOGURT:** The health-promoting bacteria in yogurt, called probiotics, fend off nasty bugs. A Swedish study showed that workers who ingested probiotics were healthier than the placebo group, who called in sick twice as often.



**BEANS:** The “magical fruit” is a great source of protein, which encourages the production of infection-fighting white blood cells and antibodies.

**FORTIFIED MILK:**

After October, the Canadian sunshine is too weak to aid our bodies in producing immunity-boosting vitamin D. Along with taking a supplement (1,000 IU per day), look for fortified skim milk to up your intake.



 [Chatelaine.com/november](http://Chatelaine.com/november)

Eat yourself healthy with our seven-day immunity-boost meal plan.

PHOTOGRAPHS: NAME THAT ILLNESS, JUPITERIMAGES; THE GREAT DEFENDERS, ISTOCKPHOTO.COM



## Stuff a fever, starve a cold? We bust the myths.

### You should feed a cold and starve a fever.

**False:** Just an old wives' tale. Starving yourself while you're sick with the flu will just make your body – and your immune system – weaker. True, if you have the flu, you may not feel like eating, but healthy food and plenty of fluids will give your body more strength to fend off a virus.

### Sweating can get rid of a cold or flu.

**False:** "Viruses don't come out of your pores," says the Halifax-based infectious-disease specialist Joanne Langle. "So you can't sweat a cold or flu out of your body." But if you're healthy, exercising regularly will give your immune system a boost for fighting off future viral attacks.

### You can catch a cold by going outside without a coat on.

**True, sort of:** Although it's not the same thing as being exposed to a virus, which is what ultimately will make you sick, being physi-

cally cold may seriously impair your immune system's ability to fight off viruses, says the Calgary-based medical officer Judy MacDonald.

### The flu is a really bad cold.

**False:** "The flu is not a cold. It's a completely different illness," says the Toronto-based family physician David Greenberg. "The common cold is a viral upper-respiratory-tract infection." That means a phlegm factory – plenty of nose-blowing, sneezing and hacking. "On the other hand, you know somebody's got the flu when they come in and say everything hurts but their eyelashes."

### Vitamin C is the best remedy for your stuffy nose and sore throat.

**False:** Overdosing on OJ will neither stop a cold in its tracks nor help you get better faster, according to a scientific review of 30 studies that concluded that vitamin C is virtually useless for preventing or treating colds.



## Healing brews

A hot cup of tea is always soothing, but these herbals are cold and flu fighters to boot.

**GREEN TEA:** Antioxidants and antibacterial properties make this tea a virus hater.

**CAMOMILE TEA:** This ancient remedy has been used to treat chest colds and is mildly sedative, for a more restful sleep.

**PEPPERMINT TEA:** The menthol in this tea decongests stuffy noses and phlegmy coughs, while calming sore throats.

## MIND YOUR P'S AND ACHOOS

You may feel too sick to mind your manners, but others will appreciate these gestures.

**Do... sneeze and cough politely by reaching for a tissue.** If you can't grab one in time, a "Miss Manners"-approved substitute is the inside of your elbow, not your hands.

**Don't... kiss your partner.** Even better: "Sleep in the guest room," advises the Winnipeg-based etiquette expert Karen Mallett. "You'll both get a better rest."

**Do... keep your pillow, water bottle and lip balm to yourself.** Even toothpaste is off limits; your germy toothbrush can touch the tube's rim when you're squeezing out paste.

**Don't... think cold medications will cover you.** You're still contagious. "Cold medications may provide some symptom relief," says the Calgary-based medical officer Judy MacDonald, "but they won't make a virus go away."

**Do... take the day off.** A poll found that 79 percent of us trudge to work when we're sick, to the annoyance of our co-workers and at the cost of a quick recovery. Choose bed rest instead.

## YOU TOLD US

### What's your trusted trick for battling a cold?



**Tina Bursdzius** I take a long, hot shower – as hot as I can handle – which unclogs my sinuses and seems to wash away all the dirt and grime. Then I head directly to bed, where a nice, fresh set of clean sheets is waiting for me to sleep away the rest of my cold.



**Kristen Ellis** I put on tons of heavy fleece, watch scary movies and eat pizza loaded with garlic and spicy peppers. I normally can't eat spicy foods, but they relieve my symptoms temporarily and they make me feel warm. I can't taste them anyway.