

# Flu-fighting tips to keep you and others healthy

Sniffles, sore throat, fever, and aches and pains may accompany a number of illnesses, but during the wintertime such symptoms are typically indicative of influenza.

Throughout much of North America, flu season peaks between December and February. But flu season can occur anywhere from October to March, advises the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The flu is contagious and can sideline people for extended periods of time. The CDC says that each year one in five Americans gets the flu.

Taking steps to fend off the flu can help men and women and the people they routinely come in contact with.

**Foods**

Food can be used to fend off the flu. Common foods that many people already have in their pantries can be powerful flu-fighters. Garlic, for example, contains compounds that have direct antiviral effects and may

help destroy the flu before it affects the body. Raw garlic is best. In addition to garlic, citrus fruits, ginger, yogurt, and dark leafy greens can boost immunity and fight the flu, according to Mother Nature’s Network. The British Journal of Nutrition notes that dark chocolate supports T-helper cells, which increase the immune system’s ability to defend against infection.

A study published in the American Journal of Therapeutics showed that carnosine, a compound found in chicken soup, can help strengthen the body’s immune system and help fight off the flu in its early stages.

**Flu shot and medications**

Annual flu shots administered in advance of flu season can help protect people and their families from getting the flu. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration says that, in select situations, antiviral medications — which are usually prescribed to treat the flu and

lessen symptoms — can reduce the chance of illness in people exposed to influenza.

Many over-the-counter medicines can alleviate symptoms of the flu, but cannot fend it off.

**Stop germ proliferation**

Germs can be spread easily between persons through direct contact and indirect contact with surfaces sick individuals have touched. Doctors recommend staying home for at least 24 hours after a flu-induced fever has dissipated. Well individuals should avoid contact with sick people.

Frequent hand-washing with soap and water can stop germs from spreading. When soap and water is not available, alcohol-based hand sanitizers can help. People also should avoid touching their eyes, noses and mouths after being in public places or around someone who is ill.

**Rest and restore**

Those who feel symptoms coming on should begin

drinking more liquids to keep the respiratory system hydrated and make mucus less viscous. Remember to get adequate sleep, as a tired body cannot effectively fight the flu virus.

People of all ages should take steps to protect themselves from the flu.



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# Safe ways to deal with sinus pressure

Sinuses are bony, hollow, air-filled cavities inside the face and skull. They are located in the low-center of the forehead, behind the eyes and in bones behind the nose. Cedars-Sinai Medical Center says the sinuses lighten the skull and produce a mucus that moisturizes the inside of the nose. Unfortunately, when colds or the flu strike, sinuses may become one of the first spots affected by these illnesses. When the sinuses are working properly, mucus will drain into the nasal passages or out the back of the throat. Most of this drainage goes unnoticed. However, the American Sinus Institute says that factors such as allergies, illness, weather changes, dehydration, and dry air can make the sinus mucus thicker and drainage more difficult. This is when problems like infection, stuffiness or throat irritation may occur. In order to combat sinus congestion and drainage concerns, people may try certain strategies that include flushing the sinuses and thinning the mucus. It is imperative to use safe flushing methods to keep the sinuses healthy. Neti pots are among the more popular methods to flushing sinuses. These small teapot-like devices with elongated snouts have become a fixture in many medicine cabinets. Because they are drug-free alternatives, they can be handy for those worried about antihistamines making them drowsy or reacting with other drugs. Neti pots and other nasal irrigation systems use saline

to moisten and clear out nasal passages to promote drainage of sinus cavities. However, according to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, using these devices improperly can increase one’s risk of infection. CBS News says that neti pots have even been linked to the deadly *Naegleria fowleri*, which is otherwise known as the “brain-eating” amoeba. The key to preventing infection is to only use previously boiled, sterile or distilled water to irrigate. Tap water is not adequately filtered, says the FDA, and may contain low levels of organisms that can stay alive in nasal passages and potentially cause serious infections. Those who are concerned about nasal irrigation safety may be wise to skip neti pots and use pre-packaged, sterile saline solutions that are bottled for the purpose of alleviating congestion. However, when prepared water is used in a clean neti pot or other device, these meth-

ods can be perfectly safe. Sinuses can get clogged for many reasons. To free up breathing, people are urged to consult their physicians to learn more about how to safely irrigate their nasal passages.

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