

York University Staff Association Health and Wellness

News and Views



Everywhere you go people are sniffing, sneezing, and coughing. Unless you live in a bubble, or never leave your home, you know at least one person suffering from a cold or flu. T'is the season. To help prevent a similar fate, you could get a flu shot, (a personal choice to be made between you and your doctor). Stores are stocking their shelves with drinks, potions and pills of immune boosting powers. Sipping on potions and popping pills can only go so far. To seriously lower your odds of illness take simple precautions to avoid germs and keep your immune system strong. An overall healthy lifestyle that includes a nutrient rich diet and exercise helps to bolster your body's natural defenses. Here is how you can improve your odds and ward off illness this sick season.

Eat to keep your Immune System Strong

Diet is the fuel that runs the human body. Essential power players include high quality protein, such as lean meats, fish, beans and lentils, all are needed to build white blood cells (the body's defenders). Coloured fruits and veggies provide immune boosting antioxidants, and omega-3 fatty acids (good sources include fish, nuts and flaxseed). Whole grain breads, pasta and cereal are all rich in vitamin B. B vitamins that are particularly critical to immune health include folic acid. Beans and legumes are rich in nutrients and vitamins and are a great source of folic acid.

Add Nutritional Power

Vitamin C won't prevent a cold, but it will ease the duration of symptoms. You may choose to take it in a multivitamin or in a single dose. Foods rich in vitamin C include bell peppers, broccoli, and of course oranges. Zinc also reduces a cold's severity and duration, at the first sign suck on a lozenge and continue every 3-4 hours. Yogurt with live cultures stimulates the production of an infection fighting substance strengthening your immune systems defenses.

Keep Moving

Cardio and resistance exercise do more than just burn off calories. Regular exercise helps circulate your blood, pumping germ fighting cells throughout your body. In fact, 30 minutes of exercise 5 days a week has been shown to minimize the amount of sick days by up to 50%. But that doesn't mean you have to spend a ton of money at the gym or on at-home equipment. Just come on out and join us for YUSA's lunchtime fitness program. Never underestimate the power of a satisfying lunch hour.

Make Sleep a Priority

If you want to stay healthy you have to get enough sleep. Plain and simple! While you sleep, your body is working hard to generate and restore, healing from damage done during the day. Sleep deprivation suppresses immune function. Sleeping between 7-9 hours each night amps up your white blood cell count—your body's natural immune system defenders.

Don't let Stress Take You Down

Instead of letting life's frustrations take you down and force you into bed, take control of your stress level and do something to calm your body and mind. Stress produces excess corticosteroid hormones that compromise your body's germ fighting ability. Listen to soothing music, knit a scarf, go for a stroll, get a massage, or take a yoga class, anything to take the edge off.

Wash Germs Away

Your best defense against lurking cold and flu bugs is good old fashioned hand washing. (Viruses can live on skin for hours.) Whether you use soap and water or alcohol-based gel, hand hygiene prevents the spread of illness by contact. Keep your hands off of your face, to avoid getting germs into your mouth, nose and eyes.

Everyone has a strong incentive to go to work every day, even when sick. However, sometimes especially during cold and flu season it's important for your health—and the health of others—to stay home.