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## Winter Wellness Tips

The winter months are notorious for bringing sickness. Influenza (flu) season begins in October and peaks between December and February. Colds are also more common during the season. Further adding to the mix of potential wintertime illnesses, COVID-19 and respiratory syncytial virus (or RSV) are swiftly circulating in the United States.

Viruses transmit more effectively in cold and dry weather, increasing your chances of coming into contact with sickness. And as cold weather drives people indoors, you're more likely to be in close contact with someone who isn't feeling well.

This article highlights tips for keeping yourself healthy during the winter months.

### Tips for Staying Healthy

Winter can be hard on your health, but you're less likely to fall ill when your body is taken care of. Consider the following tips for staying healthy:

- **Be up to date on vaccinations.** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that everyone 6 months and older receive a flu shot, with rare exceptions. This year, it's imperative to be up to date with recommended COVID-19 vaccines, too, as more people gather indoors and COVID-19 safety precautions further wane.
- **Practice proper hygiene.** Hand and respiratory hygiene are essential for preventing the spread of germs during winter. Wash your hands often or carry an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth—and always cough or sneeze into a tissue.
- **Stay hydrated.** It may be easier to drink water in the summer heat, but staying hydrated in winter is just as critical. Wintertime benefits of staying hydrated include more energy and better skin protection.
- **Get enough sleep.** Quality sleep is essential for your physical and mental well-being, and too little sleep can wreak havoc on your immune system. Adults should aim to get at least seven to nine hours of quality sleep each night.
- **Keep moving.** It's recommended that adults engage in moderate-intensity aerobic activity for at least 150 minutes each week and muscle-strengthening activities two times per week. It may seem like a lot at first, but if you break it down, that's 30 minutes of exercise five times a week. Staying on top of your fitness during winter can be challenging, but it can help your overall health this time of year.
- **Eat a healthy diet.** It's crucial to continue eating a heart-healthy diet full of fruits, vegetables and lean proteins. Eating foods high in prebiotics (e.g., asparagus, bananas, legumes and oatmeal) can also be beneficial as they feed the good bacteria in your gut.
- **Reduce your alcohol consumption.** Colder weather is often correlated with increased alcohol consumption, but it's vital to curb your intake. Not only can alcohol provoke feelings of depression, anxiety and other mental health challenges, but excessive substance use can also weaken your immune system.
- **Focus on getting vitamins.** Taking a daily multivitamin is the most efficient way to ensure your body gets the nutrients it needs. Vitamins help your body with various critical functions. For example, vitamin D helps strengthen your bones. Since wintertime often means less sunlight, most people have a reduced ability to produce vitamin D outside this time of year. Taking a supplement may fill that gap.
- **Manage stress through self-care.** Stress can negatively impact your physical and mental health, so make an effort to engage in activities you enjoy. Take time to unwind and prioritize your hobbies or other activities that help you relax and recharge.

## If You're Feeling Sick

No matter how careful you are, sickness happens. If you're not feeling well, stay home and call your doctor to explain your symptoms. Since there's some overlap between common symptoms of respiratory illnesses (e.g., flu, cold and COVID-19), it may be difficult to determine what you have. As a first step, you could take an at-home COVID-19 test.

Talk to your doctor if you have any questions about your physical or mental health during winter.

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