

# From the Nutritionist

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Winter is here ... and with it comes cold and flu season. Snowy sidewalks and chilly temperatures lead many of us to spend more time indoors, putting us at higher risk of coming down with these illnesses. While there is no guaranteed way to avoid getting sick, the right nutrition and lifestyle habits may reduce your chances of getting a cold or flu. Here are some you may want to try:

- Eat healthy foods – Choose plenty of plant foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and nuts, which contain vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients that keep your immune system strong.
- Stay hydrated – Drinking at least 8 glasses of water a day can help prevent dehydration and keep your mucous membranes soft and moist, preventing tiny cracks that allow viruses and bacteria to enter your system. Other beverages count too, if they're free of caffeine and alcohol, which can dehydrate you.
- Drink tea with honey – Green tea and many herbal teas such as peppermint may help ward off cold and flu viruses, caffeine free versions hydrate you, and warm fluids can help relieve nasal congestion. Honey helps relieve coughs and throat irritation, and may have antiviral and antibacterial properties to fight off germs.
- Have some soup – It may not be just an old wives' tale: chicken soup has been found in some studies to help reduce the severity of colds, and is a tasty way to stay hydrated!
- Try probiotics – These good bacteria found in yogurt and other fermented foods may help you stay healthy by crowding out the germs that make you sick. Try having some every day to keep germs at bay.
- Spice up your diet – Garlic and ginger are thought to have beneficial antibacterial, antiviral, antioxidant and pain relieving properties – so they may help you avoid getting sick, or ease symptoms if you do.
- Exercise regularly – Moderate exercise boosts your immune system - aim for 30-60 minutes, most days of the week. Be aware that either too much or too little exercise can actually depress the immune system.
- Manage stress – Chronic stress lowers your resistance to infection, so find ways to deal with everyday stressors in your life – you could try yoga, meditation, writing in a journal, or talking to a counselor.
- Get enough sleep – Sleep deprivation disrupts your immune system so aim for the 7-9 hours per night that most people need.
- Practice good hygiene – Frequent hand washing is the best way to avoid picking up germs – and spreading your own germs to others. While you're at it, cough or sneeze in your elbow, not your hands.

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*Andrea Hart, registered dietitian nutritionist and New York State-certified dietitian/nutritionist, is available for free, confidential, one-on-one counseling.*

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