



Health Notes

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7 TIPS TO BOOST YOUR HEALTH FOR FALL AND WINTER

As the days get shorter and the air turns crisp, it is time to prepare for the cooler months ahead. Fall and winter bring their challenges, from battling colds to staying active when it's tempting to cozy up indoors.

Thankfully, there are a few things that you can do to help you feel your best and make the most of this beautiful time of year. With the help of Colton Redding, DO, a family Medicine physician with Banner Health, we share seven simple ways to stay healthy this fall and winter.

1. Boost your immune system

Your immune system is your body's defense against infections. To keep it strong:

Eat a balanced diet: Include plenty of fruits and vegetables. These are rich in vitamins and minerals that support your immune system.

Get enough sleep: Aim for seven to nine hours of sleep each night. Sleep helps your body repair and strengthens your immune system.

Stay hydrated: Drink plenty of water. Proper hydration helps your body function at its best.

Consider supplements: Vitamin C, vitamin D and zinc can support your immune health. Even if you live in a sunny place, you may lack vitamin D. "A study found that Vitamin D plays an important role in immune regulation," Dr. Redding said. "It also is linked to sharper thinking and better emotional health."

Talk to your health care provider before starting any new supplements.

2. Stay active

It's easy to become less active when it's cold outside and gets darker earlier. But staying active all year long is important for your health. Here's how to keep moving in cold weather:

Exercise indoors: Join a gym, try a home workout or follow online exercise videos.

Bundle up and go outside: Wear warm clothes and enjoy outdoor activities like walking, hiking or even playing in the snow. "Walking just 10 minutes several times a day is not only good for your health, but it can also boost your energy levels and help fight mild-to-moderate depression," Dr. Redding said.

Try new activities: Winter sports like skiing, snowboarding or ice skating are fun ways to stay active.

3. Make healthy choices

When pecan pie or holiday cookies are staring you in the face, it's harder to make healthy choices. But Dr. Redding said no food is on the naughty list unless you have dietary restrictions.

Start with healthy, in-season foods like carrots, sweet potatoes, spinach, squash and pumpkin before digging into your favorite dishes. These seasonal foods are packed with vitamins and nutrients.

Chew more, savor the flavors and take a break between courses. This allows your stomach and mind to tell you they are full. "Remember, this is a season for celebrating and connecting with people you care about," Dr. Redding said. "When you focus on family and friends, it's easier to focus less on food."

4. Support your mental health

The colder months can sometimes affect mental well-being, especially with shorter days and less sunlight. Here's how to keep your mental health in check:



Address seasonal affective disorder (SAD): "SAD is a type of depression that happens at certain times of the year, especially in fall and winter," Dr. Redding said. Talk to your provider about light therapy or other treatments if you're feeling down.

Practice mindfulness: Techniques like meditation and deep breathing can help you stay calm and centered and reduce stress.

Stay connected: Spend time with family and friends to boost your mood and provide social support.

Take breaks: Make sure to set aside time for activities you enjoy and to relax.

5. Get vaccinated

Vaccinations are an important part of staying healthy, especially in the fall and winter. Flu and COVID-19 vaccines can help protect you and those around you:

Flu shot: The flu vaccine is updated yearly to protect against the most common strains.

COVID-19 vaccine: The shot is updated regularly to help protect people from serious illness, hospitalization and death.

Other vaccines: Ask your provider about other vaccines you might need, such as pneumonia, shingles and RSV (respiratory syncytial virus).

6. Keep your home healthy

Your home environment can affect your health. Here are some tips to create a healthy living space:

Clean regularly: Keep your home clean to reduce allergens and germs.

Use a humidifier: "Dry indoor air can cause respiratory issues," Dr. Redding said. "A humidifier can add moisture to the air."

Get some plants: Indoor plants can improve air quality and boost your mood.

7. Practice good hygiene

Good hygiene helps prevent the spread of illnesses. Here's what you can do:

Wash your hands: Use soap and water to wash your hands often, especially before eating and after using the bathroom.

Cover your mouth and nose: Use tissues or your elbow to cover your coughs and sneezes.

Stay home if you're sick: "If you feel unwell, stay home," Dr. Redding said. "This helps prevent the spread of illness to others, especially those with weakened immune systems."

Conclusion

Use these seven easy tips to stay healthy this fall and winter. Focus on keeping your immune system strong, staying active, making healthy choices and taking care of your mental health. Make your home comfortable, stay up to date with vaccinations and practice good hygiene. With these steps, you'll feel great and enjoy the season more.

PREVENTING SEASONAL FLU



Take time to get a flu vaccine

- Everyone 6 months and older should get a flu vaccine every season, especially people at higher risk.
- CDC recommends a yearly flu vaccine as the first and most important action in reducing your risk of flu and its potentially serious outcomes.
- Flu vaccines help to reduce the burden of flu illnesses, hospitalizations and deaths on the health care system each year. (Read more about flu vaccine benefits.)
- Flu vaccination also has been shown to reduce the severity of illness in people who get vaccinated but still get sick.
- For 2025-2026, all flu vaccines will be designed to protect against three influenza viruses (Visit Vaccine Virus Selection for this season's vaccine composition.)
- Everyone 6 months and older should get an annual flu vaccine, ideally by the end of October but people should continue to get vaccinated as long as flu viruses pose a threat to their community.
- Vaccination of people at higher risk of developing serious flu complications is especially important to decrease their risk of severe flu illness.
- People at higher risk of serious flu complications include young children, pregnant women, people with certain chronic health conditions like asthma, diabetes or heart and lung disease, and people 65 years and older.
- Vaccination also is important for health care workers and other people who live with or care for people at higher risk of serious flu illness to keep from spreading flu to them. This is especially true for people who work in long-term care facilities, which are home to many of the people most vulnerable to flu.
- Children younger than 6 months are at higher risk of serious flu illness but are too young to be vaccinated. People who care for infants should be vaccinated instead.

Take everyday preventive actions to stop the spread of germs.

- Take other preventive actions in addition to vaccination that may help reduce the spread of viruses like flu.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- If you are sick, limit contact with others as much as possible to keep from infecting them. For flu, CDC recommends that people stay home, for at least 24 hours, until both are true: your symptoms are getting better overall, and you have not had fever (and are not using fever-reducing medication)*. About Preventing Spread of Respiratory Viruses When You're Sick | What To Do If You Get Sick.
- After these two criteria are met, there are some additional precautions that can be taken to protect others from respiratory illness.
- These include taking steps for cleaner air and hygiene practices like cleaning frequently touched surfaces.
- More information is available about core and additional prevention strategies.
- Cover coughs and sneezes.

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wearing a mask is an additional prevention strategy that you can choose to further protect yourself and others. When worn by a person with an infection, masks reduce the spread of the virus to others. Masks can also protect wearers from breathing in infectious particles from people around them.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth. Germs spread this way.
- You can improve air quality by bringing in fresh outside air, purifying indoor air, or gathering outdoors. Cleaner air can reduce the risk of exposure to viruses..

Take flu antiviral drugs if your doctor prescribes them.

- If you are sick with flu, antiviral drugs can be used to treat your illness.
- Antiviral drugs are different from antibiotics. They are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaled powder) and are not available over-the-counter.
- Flu antiviral drugs can make flu illness milder and shorten the time you are sick. They may also prevent serious flu complications. For people at higher risk of serious flu illness, treatment with an antiviral drug can mean the difference between having a milder illness and having a very serious illness that could result in a hospital stay.
- Studies show that flu antiviral drugs work best for treatment when they are started within 2 days of getting sick, but starting them later can still be helpful, especially if the sick person is at higher risk of severe flu illness or is very sick from flu.
- If you are at higher risk of severe flu illness and get flu symptoms, call your health care provider early so you can be treated with flu antivirals if needed. Follow your doctor's instructions for taking this drug.
- Flu symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people also may have vomiting and diarrhea. People may be infected with influenza virus and have respiratory symptoms without a fever. Visit CDC's website to find out what to do if you get sick with flu. Learn about some of the similarities and differences between flu and COVID-19, and the difference between flu and the common cold.

Flu and people with chronic conditions

- Adults with certain chronic conditions are at higher risk of developing serious complications from flu.
- In fact, during recent flu seasons, 9 out of 10 people hospitalized with flu had at least one underlying health condition - that's why getting an annual flu vaccine is especially important for people with certain chronic health conditions
- A flu vaccine reduces the risk of getting sick with flu. For people with certain chronic health conditions a flu vaccine has been shown to reduce the risk of flu-related worsening of chronic conditions and prevent flu-associated hospitalization.



People at Increased Risk for Flu Complications:

- Adults 65 years and older
- Children younger than 2 years old
- People with asthma
- People with chronic lung disease (such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease [COPD] and cystic fibrosis)
- People with neurologic and neurodevelopment conditions
- People with blood disorders (such as sickle cell disease)
- People with endocrine disorders (such as diabetes mellitus)
- People with heart disease (such as congenital heart disease, congestive heart failure and coronary artery disease)
- People with kidney disorders
- People with liver disorders
- People with metabolic disorders (such as inherited metabolic disorders and mitochondrial disorders)
- People with a body mass index (BMI) of 40 kg/m2 or higher
- People younger than 19 years old on long-term aspirin- or salicylate-containing medications.
- People with a weakened immune system due to disease (such as people with HIV or AIDS, or some cancers such as leukemia) or medications (such as those receiving chemotherapy or radiation treatment for cancer, or persons with chronic conditions requiring chronic corticosteroids or other drugs that suppress the immune system)
- People who have had a stroke
- People with certain disabilities—especially those who may have trouble with muscle function, lung function, or difficulty coughing, swallowing, or clearing fluids from their airways.

Other people at higher risk from flu:

- Pregnant women, including up to 2 weeks after the end of pregnancy
- People who live in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
- People from certain racial and ethnic minority groups are at increased risk for hospitalization with flu, including non-Hispanic Black persons, Hispanic or Latino persons, and American Indian or Alaska Native persons

IN THE SPOTLIGHT:

RAISE THE ROAR

GO LIONS!

