

Naturopath Tasha Jennings helps you winter-proof your immune system

TOP TIP
Avoid catching a cold by stocking up on vitamins, keeping fit and drinking lots of water.

With the change of season comes the onset of colds and flus – and other nasty bugs. But there are some easy and practical things you can do to minimise your risk of getting sick in the lead-up to winter.

1 ECHINACEA The use of this medicinal plant was widespread among native American Indians and it became popular as an immune-boosting tonic in Europe and America in the 1930s. Echinacea purpurea or angustifolia can help prevent the onset of colds and the flu, and reduce the duration and severity of symptoms. For best results, take echinacea for short periods as a preventative over the winter months or at the onset of symptoms.

2 PROBIOTICS Did you know that about 70 per cent of your immune system is in your gut? The digestive system is responsible for breaking down and absorbing all the essential nutrients from your diet, as well as recognising and eliminating any 'bad bugs' that may make their way into your system. Basically, the digestive system is your first line of defence, making sure the good stuff gets in and the bad stuff is kept out!

Consuming a good dose of probiotic bacteria can help support healthy gut function, improving resistance to infection as well as reducing bloating and sluggishness.

Probiotics are naturally found in yoghurt. It's best to choose a naturally set yoghurt for optimal probiotic activity or you can find probiotics in convenient capsule form.



3 PROPOLIS Collected by honey bees from trees and plants, propolis has been used medicinally from as far back as 350BC. This naturally dark, slightly sticky liquid possesses potent antibacterial, antiviral, antiseptic and antibiotic properties, which makes it an excellent broad-spectrum immune supporter. It has proven to be particularly beneficial used as a lozenge or gargled to treat sore throat.

7 natural ways to BOOST YOUR



4 ZINC Zinc is vital for optimal immune function. This essential mineral plays an important role in the formation of white blood cells, which are like the 'soldiers' of our immune system. The more healthy white blood cells the body can produce, the better equipped the immune system will be to fight off potential infection. Good sources of dietary zinc include meat, chicken, fish, cheese, pulses and wholegrains. As a supplement, it's best to look for one in the form of zinc amino acid chelate for maximum absorption.

5 VITAMIN C Like zinc, vitamin C is involved in the production of our infection-fighting white blood cells. Vitamin C also has antioxidant properties to keep you feeling and looking great. Good sources of vitamin C include kiwifruit, oranges, grapefruit, broccoli and cauliflower. Consume fruits and vegies raw or lightly steamed as vitamin C is easily destroyed by heat. In supplementary form, look for vitamin C in the form of calcium ascorbate or ascorbic acid combined with bioflavonoids to optimise absorption.



6 EXERCISE Increased incidence of colds and flus during the winter months may not just be due to the drop in temperature, but also the drop in our physical activity. Moderate daily exercise has been proven to boost the immune system and can also help reduce stress and improve sleep patterns, both of which have a positive effect on immune function. Don't worry, there's no need to set the alarm for a 20km morning marathon! Just 30 minutes of moderate activity, most days, is all that's required.



7 OLIVE LEAF EXTRACT Olive leaf extract is a champion immune booster. This wonderful health-promoting extract contains an active ingredient called oleuropein. Oleuropein possesses natural antiviral and antibacterial properties, making it effective in fighting all types of winter bugs. It also happens to be one of the most powerful antioxidants providing protection against free radical damage and helping to reduce signs of ageing.

Already sick? IS IT A COLD OR THE FLU?

There are similarities between a cold and the flu, but knowing the difference will help you know how to treat both.

■ **THE SIMILARITIES** Both begin with a sore, scratchy throat, runny nose, headache and sometimes a cough.

■ **THE DIFFERENCES** The flu comes with a fever (38 degrees or more) and includes aching limbs, chills and exhaustion. An upset stomach can also occur. Symptoms can peak at three days, but you should start to feel better in five to eight days. A cold, however, will not stop you in your tracks and is usually accompanied by a sore throat, a cough and blocked ears. While headaches are common, there is rarely a temperature to go along with it. A cold can last five to seven days.

■ **THE TREATMENT** You can take paracetamol to lower your temperature if you have the flu. But if you are in a high-risk group - above 65 years of age or suffering from a chronic disease - see your GP, who might give you anti-viral medication such as Tamiflu. For a cold, you can take painkillers for headaches and sip hot drinks to soothe the throat.



Q&A



Biggest Loser trainer Michelle Bridges answers all your fitness questions

Q I'm confused about stretching. Is it best to stretch before or after exercise? And what's the best stretch for walkers or joggers?

G. GILES, VIA

A There's actually no evidence to suggest that stretching before exercise is of any physiological benefit. In fact, stretching cold muscles could even have the reverse effect and be harmful.

Before an exercise session you should increase the blood flow to your muscles with a light warm-up, taking your muscles and joints through the range of motion that they can expect to go through in the workout itself. At the end of the session try to stretch your entire body, paying particular attention to the principal muscles you have used. As a jogger, these would be your legs, calves, hips and buttocks.

Our calves particularly stiffen and shorten as we age and are more prone to injury, so ensuring you include a good post-workout calf stretch is a must.

Next, stretch both of your quadriceps by bending your leg and grasping your ankle behind you. Make sure that you balance each movement with a hamstring stretch on the same leg.

Then lie on the ground with one leg bent. Raise the opposite leg above you, clasping your hands behind the knee, and gently pull your leg towards you. Then swap and use the other leg.

Still lying on the ground, bring one leg up into a right angle, leaving your foot flat on the ground, and cross the other leg over it. Use your hand to gently push the crossed knee away to open the hip. Get more out of the stretch by reaching through and clasping your hands behind the knee of the grounded leg, then gently pulling both legs towards you.

For more details on these and other stretches, check out my book *Crunch Time, Lose Weight Fast and Keep It Off* (Penguin, \$34.95).

ASK MICHELLE BRIDGES FOR ADVICE

Do you have a question for Michelle? Post it to Michelle Bridges, New Idea, GPO Box 7814, Sydney, NSW 2001, or email health@newidea.com.au.

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