

U.S. Consumers spent \$3.6 Billion on over-the-counter cold, cough, and flu remedies in 2005

A few steps between the end of August and Mid Sept can help you avoid winter bugs – and the expense it takes to cure them

It's almost that time of year again, flu and cold season. So it's time to start building your defenses now. Your immune system needs more protection during winter months, and it takes a few months to boost that protection, says Elson Hass, M.D., author of *Staying Healthy with Nutrition*. What's in it for you? Not only improving your odds of avoiding the misery of being sick but also the expense. In 2005 consumers spent over \$3.6 billion on over-the-counter drugs, not to mention money lost in unpaid sick days, insurance co-pays, and prescription medications. All of us here at **Live Free Home Health Care** not only want to see you stay healthy and enjoy a joyous time of year (Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Years) but we want to see you hold onto more of your hard earned money! So here are some things you can do now to stay on your feet this winter season.

Gauge Your Risk

We have all heard this before: if your immune system is vulnerable, you have a greater chance of getting a pesky bug if you are exposed and it also takes you longer to get over that nagging cold or flu. To find out how at risk you are, answer these five questions:

1. **Did you have more than two bouts of cold or flu last year?**
2. **Do you suffer from allergies? (Boy, I do, year round, drives me crazy!)**
3. **Do you often feel fatigued?**
4. **Do you get less than seven hours of sleep a night?**
5. **Do you notice that wounds take longer to heal than they should?**

If you answered yes more than no, the more aggressive you should consider being in trying to build up your defenses. If you said yes to four or five of the questions, it is a good idea to schedule an appointment with your primary care physician for a pre-flu-season checkup, and ask whether you should have a complete blood count test, which shows how many of those wonderful disease-fighting white blood cells you have on guard. Typically your insurance will cover this check-up. If your levels are low your doctor can talk to you about a course of action.

Get Your Guard Up

Increase your chances of staying cold and flu free with this 60 day Rx:

- **Get a good nights sleep** – Ohio State University recently did a study showing that students who pulled all-nighters had depressed immunity, and this study is just one of many that link lack of sleep to greater chances of illness. If you add as little as 4 hours of sleep a week, it may help says Dr. Haas.
- **Eat a Yogurt A Day** – I personally love all the health benefits of yogurt. The biggest benefit of yogurt for warding off colds and the flu is a “friendly” bacterium, *Lactobacillus acidophilus*. It helps stymie the growth of bad germs. It's found in most yogurts, just check the labels. My favorite is Yoplait, and it comes in many tasty flavors.

- **Get Vaccinated** – Did you know a flu shot is 90% effective against common strains? You should get a flu shot, especially if you are in a high-risk group such as kids and the elderly. Talk to your doctor or look for a flu clinic in your community, or call us at **Live Free Home Health Care**, and we will help you find a location for that flu shot, if we aren't holding our own clinic. If, like me, you hate needles, you could discuss the new nasal vaccine, FluMist.
- **Add Some Astragalus** – This ancient Chinese herb may prevent colds by helping boost immunity. You can find it at health food stores but it's good idea to talk to your doctor before using it.

Mount a Swift Defense

If you are struck with a cold or flu, you should act fast to fight it.

- **For Colds:** Take 1000 mg of Vitamin C and 8mg of zinc, this has been shown to decrease the length of the cold, when taken when symptoms first occur.
- **For The Flu:** Up to two days after symptoms begin (fever, fatigue, achiness, chills), talk to your doctor about the prescription medications Tamiflu or Relenza. These new antiviral drugs have been effective in shortening the course of the flu by a few days, and getting over the flu a little quicker sounds like a good deal to me!

A few other tips your friends here at **Live Free Home Health Care** recommend is eating a proper diet, getting plenty of exercise, washing your hands frequently, and even carrying around a small bottle of antibacterial hand lotion. Here's wishing you a healthy and joyous winter!

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Reference: Money Magazine, Sept. 2006, p.45. Curtis Pesmen.