

# Stay Healthy

## Winter Cold and Cough SURVIVAL KIT

By Nicole Pajer

**C**ommon colds: They're the No. 1 reason people call in sick to work and school. And, even when we practice good habits—like hand washing and avoiding touching our eyes, nose and mouth—we're unlucky enough to get an average of two to three colds a year, mostly during the winter. That's why these new ideas about cold and cough prevention are so interesting—and worth a try.



### LISTEN TO RELAXING MUSIC

Turning on jazz tunes can boost the immunoglobulin A (IgA) levels found in secretions like tears and saliva, research shows. "A decreased level of IgA puts us at risk for infections spread through mucous membranes," says Rashanna Lynch, M.D., associate medical director of the William F. Ryan Community Health Center in Manhattan. "Improving your mood will increase endorphins and your IgA. That would definitely help you fight off a viral respiratory infection."



### EAT CHOCOLATE

A study published in *Chemistry Central Journal* revealed that dark chocolate contains significantly more antioxidants than most fruit juices. "Chocolate is a natural medium for revving up your immune system," says Stephanie Wages, a registered dietitian in Beverly Hills. "Ideally, you want at least 70 percent cacao and a bar that doesn't contain refined sugar, soy lecithin or dairy."



### TRY A SHOT OF SALINE

In winter, a dry nose is the enemy. "Your mucus is a critical first line of defense against toxins and viruses in the air," says Darshan Shah, M.D., founder of Next Health in Los Angeles. "It traps would-be pathogens before they have a chance to enter our bloodstream." New saline nasal sprays such as Arm & Hammer Simply Saline (\$10, drugstores) are a convenient alternative to a neti pot (a nasal irrigation system) to moisturize the mucus membranes and keep the nose from being an access point for harmful viruses and bacteria.

### MEDITATE

The stress-reducing effects of meditation have long been recognized, but recently the practice has also been celebrated for its immune-boosting properties. A University of Wisconsin study found that an eight-week course of mindfulness meditation resulted in increased levels of antibodies—blood proteins produced to protect the body from bacteria and viruses. "Start with five minutes a day," says Edward Vilga, author of *Yoga in Bed*. "Find a moment to sit still, close your eyes and simply observe your breath."

### POP A PROBIOTIC

A large number of immune cells are found in the intestines, and good gut health is increasingly being linked to protection from infection and a host of other diseases. "Daily probiotics are a great defense during flu season, if not all year long," says Erica Lehman, M.D., founder of Pro Health Group in Beverly Hills, Calif. She recommends choosing a supplement that contains at least three different bacteria strains such as *Lactobacillus* and *Bifidobacterium*, which survive the digestion process, and a minimum of 5 billion colony forming units (CFUs).

### WATCH FUNNY SHOWS

Good news for Amy Schumer and *Saturday Night Live*: Turns out "laughter lowers the stress hormone cortisol, increases the release of neurotransmitters, which can also ward off depression, and increases the production of natural killer cells, which defend against colds and flus," says John Salerno, M.D., a board-certified family physician in New York City.

### GIVE DANCING A WHIRL

"Dancing is a great way to improve lymphatic function and to help you to detoxify," says Erica Hornthal, founder of Chicago Dance Therapy. "Stimulating the circulation and passage of fluids within the body can help maintain a healthier immune system, which will help us fight off illness." To give your lymphatic system a boost, take a dance class, try Zumba or rock out to your favorite song at home. Don't like dancing? Walk on the treadmill, do yoga or Pilates—anything that gets you moving is good for your immune system.