

7 SECRETS *for* KEEPING COLDS AWAY

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*For more information on children's health, nutrition and fitness
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There's no such thing as "cold season". With more children in daycare, year round schools, and packed summer schedules, colds are to be dreaded year round. On average children catch 3 colds per year, while boys and younger children can average up to 8! What can you do to keep these colds away from your children and out of your home?

Here are 7 sure-fire strategies to make sure your house falls way below "average"!

1. MAKE HAND WASHING A HABIT

The trick to hand washing being an effective cold prevention tool is to have it to become automatic, for it to happen frequently and for the hand washing itself to effectively kill and wash away unwanted germs. Here's my 4-Step Hand Washing Recipe for washing those germs down the drain.

➤ **Sing the ABCs**

When washing, hands should be lathered for as long as it takes to sing the *ABCs*, or for variety, *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star* or *Itsy Bitsy Spider*. You get the idea.

➤ **Make a Teepee**

After lathering, have your child make a teepee with his fingers interlocked to make sure the germs hiding between his fingers are captured. Wiggle those fingers around.

➤ **Think 6**

Hands should be washed a minimum of six times a day—before meals, snacks and bedtime, and after every bathroom break. As you know, bathroom breaks frequently correspond to getting ready for snack/meal time, hence the somewhat arbitrary magic number six goal.

➤ **Use A Star Chart**

A Hand Washing Star Chart can turn hand washing into a habit as automatic as putting on a bike helmet or wearing a seat belt. Feel free to use my Hand Washing Star Chart at the end of

this article. You'll need to purchase small star stickers of different colors from your favorite office supply store and be committed to doing it for three or more weeks.

Every time hands are washed, give your child a star. If the Star Chart is filled for the day, make a big deal about it and give your child a huge hug and a little treat (a bigger star or other special type of sticker). If he fills up the Star Chart for the entire week, give your child a little bigger treat like a cool pencil, marker or eraser. After three weeks of filling-up the Star Chart, give your child something really special (i.e., going to the movies, batting cages or having a picnic at the park). Repeat this 3-week reward cycle three times or until you feel hand washing is automatic.

2. GET YOUR SCHOOL INVOLVED

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention issued hand washing guidelines in 2002 for doctors, nurses and other health care workers recommending the use of an alcohol-based hand rub to keep hands germ free. (When hands are visibly dirty, soap and water are recommended in the guideline). How can this translate to the school setting?

➤ **Work the Class Supply List**

Many schools post a supply list requirement in the beginning of the year by grade. It frequently includes things that will be shared by the class throughout the year (like a box of tissue). Contact the principal at your school and ask that an alcohol-based hand rub be included on each class' supply list.

➤ **Start a "Pump It Up" Campaign**

Ask your child's teacher to place the gel bottles near the door exit. (You might need to offer to make/buy a shelf to hold the gel.) Get your teachers agreement to request that the kids "pump it up" before going to lunch, snack time and after bathroom breaks. This might be something your PTA could also encourage in its

newsletters. You could also work with your child's teacher, the principal or the PTA to create a "Pump It Up" arts and crafts awareness project school-wide.

➤ **Arm Your Child**

In addition, give your child a bottle of his own alcohol-based hand rub to keep at his desk, "cubby" or back pack, so that he can "pump it up" whenever necessary.

3. PRACTICE SAFE S.E.X...

where S.E.X. stands for sleeping, eating and eXercising. Sorry, but I couldn't resist the catchy headline. Do please make sure your child gets enough sleep, eats balanced meals, drinks plenty of fluids, and eXercises regularly. These are proven prevention measures that make the immune system strong and ward off both colds and flu.

Exercise should be of moderate intensity, such as cycling, or brisk walking, thirty minutes a day cumulatively. This means if your boy plays tag at recess for 15 minutes and rigorously beats up brother after dinner for another 15 minutes, he has met the minimum "sufficient" exercise for the day.

With schedules, school work and extracurricular activities being what they are, parents (yes you mom and dad!) must insure their children (even teenagers) get 8 – 11 hours of sleep a night with the higher range being for children under the age of eight.

A daily "quiet time" can also have important health benefits. It can serve to relieve anxiety, improve nighttime sleep and stimulate the immune function of stressed individuals. And, if you are stressed, your children are stressed too.

.....**COLD HARD FACTS**.....

- ❖ Cold temperatures do NOT cause a cold. However, cold temperatures can make cold symptoms WORSE as cold weather restricts nasal blood passages causing congestion and makes mucus slower and hence more difficult to eliminate viruses and bacteria that have invaded.
- ❖ There are 23 million school days missed each year because of the common cold.
- ❖ In case you are wondering, kids in daycare get twice as many colds. However, their immune system appears to develop over time resulting in daycare kids getting 1/3 fewer colds as their non-daycare counterparts once they reach adolescents.
- ❖ Parents catch half their kids' colds.
- ❖ Moms get at least one more cold per year than dads.
- ❖ Cold germs invade through the eyes, nose and mouth. At school, a child may cover his mouth when he sneezes, pick up a crayon, pass it to the child next to him--passing along his cold germs as well. The previously uninfected child then rubs his nose, eyes or mouth and, presto, the germ has invaded.
- ❖ There are over 200 different types of cold viruses.
- ❖ While your child may feel tired and complain of aches, cold symptoms are primarily found above the neck, while flu symptoms affect the entire body.
- ❖ The incubation period for a cold is 1 – 5 days before symptoms start. Within 1 – 3 days of symptoms occurring, nasal secretions usually become thicker and perhaps yellow or green—this is a normal part of the common cold and NOT a reason for antibiotics.
- ❖ A typical cold lasts for about 7 days with a few symptoms lasting a little longer. If it lasts much longer than that, a sinus infection or allergies may be to blame.

4. DO THE DAYCARE DANCE

If practical, and maybe even if not, please consider using a daycare service with six or fewer children to dramatically decrease your child's germ exposure. If this isn't practical, place extra effort on initiating a "Pump It Up" Campaign at your daycare center and in using the Star Chart system at home to make hand washing a strong habit.

Place special emphasis in your "Pump it Up" campaign on using the alcohol-based hand rub after nose wiping, diapering, and before food preparation. You may also consider questioning your daycare center about how often they wash sleeping mats if your child is of that age group. At a minimum, they should be disinfected once a week.

5. CLEAN THE AIR

You should consider replacing the heating/air filters in your home. Filter technology has improved greatly since your heating/air filters were likely last changed. Older generations of filters have a way of constantly re-circulating germs throughout the entire home. Yuck. Newer HEPA filters can remove 99.97% of the pollen, dust, animal dander, and even bacteria, from the air.

6. BUILD THE IMMUNE SYSTEM

Nutritional supplements and herbs can make a contribution to childhood health. There are plenty of off-the-shelf purchases you can make to strengthen your child's immune system. Here are some supplements that could be right for your household.

➤ **Zinc:**

62% of the young children do not get enough zinc in their diets. Kids who don't get enough zinc frequently get sick more often and stay sick longer. In addition to preventing colds and other illnesses, giving zinc at the first sign of cold symptoms can help cut a cold short.

According to the Journal of Pediatrics, when zinc-deficient children received zinc supplements, childhood infection rates plummeted. In this report, pneumonia incidence dropped by over 40%, while diarrhea illness dropped 25%. Other studies suggest that giving zinc will reduce the incidence of both colds and flu.

Most high-protein foods also contain high amounts of zinc. Zinc is found in greater concentrations in red and dark meats than in light meat. Zinc supplements are best absorbed on an empty stomach. However, straight zinc can cause stomach aches.

Ask your doctor about the benefits of zinc for your child and about what form and dose it should be taken. There are some indications that large doses of zinc over extended periods can weaken the body's antioxidant defenses, lower HDL (good cholesterol) and actually weaken the immune system in adults.

➤ **Flax Seed:**

A recent study found that 2 grams of flax oil a day decreased the frequency, severity and duration of illness and days missed from school. Interestingly, studies on flax are also revealing its benefits in warding off breast cancer.

➤ **Vitamin C:**

Vitamin C's ability to prevent colds is one of the most widely held beliefs in health land. Vitamin C, in fact, is shown to increase the activity of white blood cells when given in 500 mg doses per day to adults. Additionally, some findings suggest Vitamin C can also reduce the longevity and seriousness of the cold symptoms. Consult your doctor for the preventative dosage that is right for your child.

➤ **Lactobacillus Milk/Yogurt Cultures**

There is growing evidence that beneficial bacteria can prevent infections. A study among 18 daycare centers, revealed that children who

drank 8 - 9 ounces of lactobacillus milk missed daycare due to illness 11% less than those who did not. They also had 17% fewer complicated respiratory illnesses and needed 19% fewer antibiotic prescriptions.

➤ **Multivitamins:**

And last but not least, the proverbial “Flintstone” daily vitamin may strengthen the immune system and help ward off colds.

7. SHORTEN COLD/COMFORT CHILD

When your child does catch a cold, there are plenty of off-the shelf purchases you can make to reduce its duration and make your child feel more comfortable. In fact, over \$3 billion was spent in 2001 to minimize the effects of colds.

One widely used supplement to reduce the duration of the common cold is Echinacea. Studies have found it to be relatively effective in reducing the length of a cold, but not actually preventing colds. Echinacea studies have almost entirely been conducted on adults. Information about the childhood risks and benefits is scarce. We do know Echinacea should not be taken for an extended period of time (8 weeks or more).

When it is determined your child does have a cold (and not the flu, allergies or asthma—but more on that later), you can help shorten its duration.

- ✓ Do make sure plenty of fluids are consumed
- ✓ Do try to raise the temperature of the nose and throat since cold viruses live best at 98.6 degrees.
 - Have your child breath in steam.
 - Serve hot drinks like caffeine free teas of various flavors
 - Give your child hot (and even cold) lemonade (cold germs don't like acidity)

- Gargle with hot, salty water (cold germs don't like salt)
- Serve hot and salty soups like chicken noodle for a double wallop

✓ Don't force foods if your child doesn't feel like eating.

Up to 60% of children with common colds are treated with antibiotics. Because children average 3 – 8 colds each year, most accompanied by thick, runny noses, children can get many, many rounds of unnecessary (and therefore) harmful antibiotics.

Do pay attention to the duration of a cold. If cold symptoms last for 10 – 14 days, versus the typical 7 days, your child could have developed a sinus infection.

Please do NOT use antibiotics “just to be on the safe side”. Children may get better quicker, but then they are more likely to get sick more often, with longer, more stubborn infections caused by more resistant organisms. To be on the safe side, antibiotics should be WITHHELD unless they are clearly needed. When seeing your pediatrician be sure to tell him or her your preference—that you'd prefer to NOT use antibiotics unless there was no other way to safely help comfort your child to wellness.

I hope you found this helpful. Here's to happy, healthy children.

Sincerely,

John Burstein



If you found this article helpful, check out our companion video **Germ Invaders** for kids under 9 at www.slimgoodbody.com/products.html and get them on the hand washing health train.



	Brkft	Snack	Lunch	Snack	Dinner	BR	BR
Monday	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆
Tuesday	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆
Wednesday	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆
Thursday	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆
Friday	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆
Saturday	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆
Sunday	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆

REWARDS:
 5 or more stars per day = _____
 28 or more stars per week = _____
 35 or more stars per week = **VERY SPECIAL TREAT**

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Sources: Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine; Dr. Greene’s Pediatric Update; Nutrition Action Newsletter; Eugene School District Newsletter; Journal of Pediatrics; British Medical Journal; USDA “What We Eat In America” Survey, 1999; Immune Power For Kids, Leo Galland MD; Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine, 154, P610
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