

Reader's Digest

WWW.RD.COM

11 Things You Should Do at the First Sign of Flu

“The single best way to prevent seasonal flu is to get vaccinated each year,” says [Niket Sonpal, MD](#), a New York City-based internist and gastroenterologist. While a flu shot will significantly decrease your chances of getting the flu it is still possible to contract the virus, so make sure to take extra precautions (like the ones outlined here) in addition to getting vaccinated, especially if you start to feel the symptoms associated with the flu.



How to know if you're getting the flu

Dr. Sonpal says the first signs of flu can include feeling feverish, having chills, a cough, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headaches, fatigue, and vomiting or diarrhea (though the last two tend to happen more in children than adults). If you have one or more of these symptoms, talk to your doctor to see if you have the flu and follow these early treatment tips. Here are [10 signs your flu might be deadly](#).

Wash your hands

If you are starting to feel like you might have a cold or the flu, washing your hands can reduce the risk of spreading the virus to others. 'This is an easy way to stop the spreading of germs,' Dr. Sonpal says. In fact, a [study](#) published in *Tropical Medicine & International Health* found that good hand washing hygiene reduced the risk of respiratory illness by 16 percent.

Rest

Stop exercising and try not to overexert yourself, recommends Dr. Sonpal. Trying to keep up with your regular routine will only dehydrate you and make your symptoms worse. 'Remember there is no quick fix for the flu, and many people don't feel completely back to normal for about three weeks,' Dr. Sonpal adds. Here are [9 ways to prepare for the flu](#) before it hits.

Don't ask for antibiotics

'Antibiotics don't kill viruses,' Dr. Sonpal says. 'Although many people believe their favorite antibiotic will cure any illness they have, that just isn't the case.' If you catch your flu within the first 48 hours of infection, your doctor may prescribe Tamiflu, an antiviral medication that can shorten the lifespan of your flu; however, says Dr. Sonpal, in most patients it only saves about one day of illness.

Try over-the-counter pain relievers

What will ease your flu symptoms are OTC pain relievers, such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen, especially if you have a fever. It can help reduce your symptoms and provide flu relief. Dr. Sonpal says to use these as directed on the label, as getting the proper dosage is key to relieving body aches, headaches, and pain symptoms related to the flu. Check out [four home remedies doctors use for pain relief](#).

Make sure not to overdo it on the vitamins

It's fine to continue taking your daily multivitamin if you feel up to it, but be aware that taking too many vitamins can have negative effects. 'Ultra-high doses of vitamin C can cause diarrhea,' says Dr. Sonpal. 'Although a few studies suggest vitamin C might shorten the duration of a cold, other studies contradict this, and no major studies show benefit for influenza.' Find out the other [vitamin myths you should stop believing](#).

Fuel with food

'If you are able to eat, stock up on foods that can help boost your immune system,' recommends Dr. Sonpal. This includes yogurt, fruits like blueberries and vegetables like broccoli. For those feeling nauseous, chicken soup is another option, Dr. Sonpal adds. 'Chicken soup can help reduce inflammation, clear up mucous, and ease congestion,' he says. Here are [14 foods that may help your symptoms](#).

Drink up

Water is always best to keep you hydrated and help loosen up mucous, but any liquid without caffeine will do, says Dr. Sonpal. If you're starting to have water fatigue, he recommends Gatorade, ginger ale, diluted juice, broth, or decaffeinated tea.

Skip caffeine

Coffee and tea with caffeine can dehydrate you, says Dr. Sonpal. Dehydration may make your symptoms feel worse and your sickness last longer. And while this probably goes without saying, alcohol has the same effect: Though it may be tempting, that hot toddy isn't going to help you feel better. You won't believe some of these [old-time remedies that were once used to treat the flu](#).

Cancel social engagements

Stay home from work, school, and all social events. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that you steer clear of others for [at least 24 hours after your fever is gone](#). Flu symptoms can start anywhere from one to two days after the virus has entered the body, meaning you could be spreading it to others before you even realize you have it. This makes it even more crucial to reschedule events the moment you start to feel off.

<https://www.rd.com/health/conditions/stop-first-sign-flu/>