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This Month's Focus: Staying Healthy During Flu Season

Fall is a beautiful season, with cool, crisp days and the excitement of holiday planning ahead. Fall is also the beginning of cold and flu season, though, and it's hard to enjoy the crunch of autumn leaves when you're sniffing and sneezing.

This month, we're sharing some strategies to help you stay well and enjoy the season! If you'd like more information, check out the interactive e-learning program [Staying Healthy During Flu Season: Tips for Enhancing Your Health.](#)



Flu Season: Ten Things You Can Do to Protect Yourself and Others

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. Older people, young children and people with certain health conditions are particularly vulnerable to serious flu complications. Fortunately, there are several steps you can take to protect yourself and others:

1. **Get flu shots:**

The CDC maintains that a yearly flu shot is the first and most important step in preparing for flu season. The flu shot is recommended for people six months of age and older, including healthy people, those with chronic medical conditions and pregnant women. It is designed to protect against the main flu strains expected to cause the most illness this flu season. Your immune system takes time to respond to the flu vaccine, so you should try to get vaccinated six to eight weeks before flu season begins in November.

2. **Recognize flu symptoms:**

They include fever, headache, muscle aches, chills, fatigue, dry cough, runny nose (more common in children than in adults) and stomach problems such as nausea. You don't have to have all of these symptoms. Any combination is reason to suspect the flu.

3. **If you think you have the flu, see your doctor:**

The first signs of flu are not reason to rush to the hospital. A doctor can make a diagnosis and prescribe medication that's effective.

4. **Avoid close contact with others:**

Guard against coming into close contact with people who are sick; stay away from others if you're feeling sick.

5. **If you're sick, stay home:**

You don't do your employer or coworkers any favors by going into work and putting others at risk. Be even more careful with your child. If you suspect the flu, school is out.

6. **Don't travel if you're sick:**

A relatively small enclosed space where people are packed close together - such as on a plane, train or bus - is a perfect environment for spreading flu. If you're ill, stay put.

7. **Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing:**

Not only is it good manners, it helps prevent spreading your illness to people around you. Cough or sneeze into a tissue or your elbow, instead of your hand.

8. **Keep your hands clean:**

Frequent, thorough hand washing is effective against germs. Rub your hands vigorously with soap for 15-20 seconds. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers also work.

9. **Try not to touch your eyes, nose or mouth:**

Touching something that's contaminated and then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth can spread flu.

10. **Keep yourself, and your immune system, strong:**

Get plenty of sleep, exercise, avoid stress, drink plenty of fluids and follow a healthy diet.

Sometimes news reports can raise children's anxiety about the flu. Reassure them that most people are not getting sick, and that most people who get sick get better. Explain what we all can do to protect ourselves, such as washing our hands often and not sharing food or drinks.

Check out the [Staying Healthy During Flu Season](#) e-learning program on our member website for extra tips on enhancing your health. MHN's member website provides a variety of resources - from articles to assessments - to help you get fit, eat well, quit smoking and achieve other goals.



Make Time for Fun and Relaxation

A sense of play and the ability to relax are second nature to some people. These folks don't need to be reminded of how good it feels to whack a tennis ball over a net or help their kids build a city from blocks. Others may forget that play and relaxation have a purpose.

WHY YOU NEED LEISURE

- Doing something you enjoy for an hour a day can keep your life in balance.
- Physical play, sports or exercise can help dissolve tension during stressful times.
- When you add more leisure to your life, you'll become a healthier and more effective employee and parent.

HOW TO HAVE FUN

Have you forgotten how to have fun? If so, don't lose hope. Play is serious business for kids, so take some cues from your children. Healthy, happy kids invest their entire heart and soul in their play activities. They approach their physical games and flights of imagination with a kind of abandon most adults have forgotten is possible.

- When it's your turn to play, choose some activities that are just for you. You can do other activities as a family.
- If you need to schedule leisure time activities into your busy day, do so.
- Pick sports, hobbies and outings that simply make everyone in your family feel good.
- Remember to allow time for unexpected pleasures.
- Reserve quiet times at the beginning or end of the day to meditate or relax with a favorite quiet activity, such as reading or crafts.

DEVOTE YOURSELF TO FUN

Once you've chosen an activity, put your whole heart and mind into it. If you have trouble letting go of worries and responsibilities, imagine that you've sealed them in a box and stashed the box away for a few hours. Here are some ideas for having fun:

PERSONAL RECREATION

- Pursue a new hobby or return to something you once loved to do.
- Establish and maintain a regular exercise program.
- Learn a new sport. Consider racquetball, cycling, jogging, soccer or dancing.
- Join a book discussion group.
- Express your creativity through crafts, music or art.
- Volunteer in your community.
- Enroll in a class.
- Call someone you haven't talked to in a long time.
- Go for a walk in a new part of town.

FAMILY FUN

- Attend a game, play or concert at your local high school or college.
- Take your children to a special movie or amusement center.
- Go on cycling trips.
- Visit the zoo.
- Fly a kite.
- Take day trips to the country.
- Take walks around the neighborhood or to the park or library.
- Play charades and board games instead of watching television.
- Visit science and art museums.
- Make planning your vacation a family activity. Encourage your children to read about your destination and list the activities or sights that interest them most.
- Participate in bike-a-thons, walk-a-thons and other fund raisers.



Reducing Stress: Your Secret Weapon Against the Flu

It happens each winter. Our coworkers call in sick, or work miserably through coughs and sneezes. Our kids bring home one bug after another. How can we avoid spending the entire winter home sick with the flu?

Getting a flu shot is a good idea for most people. So is washing your hands and eating well. But we often forget the connection between our mental health and our physical health.

THE MIND-BODY CONNECTION

Our bodies respond to the way we feel, think and act. Through this "mind-body connection," our bodies send us messages about our mind. Stressful events, such as a career change or the loss of a loved one, can put our emotional health at risk. The emotional pain we try to ignore may show up as backaches, stomach problems or trouble sleeping.

Stress may also be expressed through a weakened immune system. Many studies have found a connection between stress and people's risk of getting sick.¹ Battling stress for long periods may make it harder for us to fight the cold and flu germs that surround us every winter. Some stress is beyond our control, but we can all improve our strategies for coping.

TAKING ACTION

Of course, the old common-sense tips for staying healthy still apply: Wash your hands frequently with soap and water. Avoid touching your mouth or nose, and wash your hands immediately if you do. When you cough or sneeze, cover your mouth with your elbow or a tissue, not with your bare hand. And during flu season, avoid sharing drinking glasses, cigarettes, food and other items that may be contaminated with germs.

Beyond these basics, though, it's important to pay attention to how you manage stress. Here are a few tips:

- Think through your list of responsibilities. Can you trim that list? Sometimes we agree to more than we can handle.
- Embrace optimism. A new challenge at work means you have an opportunity to shine. A booked calendar means you have a full, rich life. Don't deny the problems you face, but don't dwell on them, either.
- Communicate openly with people you care about - friends, family, and partner.
- Take care of yourself. Regular exercise relieves stress and may boost your immune system. Watch your intake of caffeine and other stimulants, which can interfere with sleep and increase anxiety.
- Relax. Relaxation techniques and practices such as yoga, meditation and tai chi can decrease stress and improve your sleep. Try a few techniques to see what works best for you - they may require some practice in the beginning.

If managing your stress is difficult, you should seek help. Speak to your family doctor, or consult with your EAP.



Daily Living Services

Ever feel dizzy trying to juggle all of life's responsibilities? MHN's Daily Living Services can dig up hard-to-find information and resources and identify businesses and services that can meet your needs.

We can help you:

- Find a business or service nationwide: pet care... landscaping... auto repair... home maintenance... travel agency... you name it! We'll compile a list of providers in two zip codes for you within twelve business hours.
- Find tickets to your next event
- Research special projects
- Locate alternative medicine providers
- Identify nutrition and fitness services

Getting Started is Easy!
Call your EAP for more information.