

THE 7 HABITS OF
HIGHLY EFFECTIVE

COLD & FLU DODGERS

The average adult gets two to three colds per year. But since when are you content to settle for average? These proven strategies will help bring your number down...maybe even to zero

by KATE ROCKWOOD



1

WASH YOUR HANDS!

Do it any time they get germey—not just after you shake hands or use the bathroom. Contact with the germ zones listed here calls for a thorough job...

The office coffeepot.

Everyone touches it after commuting in, often before they've washed up.

Elevator and ATM buttons.

Viruses can survive on plastic surfaces for hours or even days.

Your purse.

Admit it: When there's no hook in a public restroom, you put your bag on the floor—then you toss it on the kitchen counter when you get home (blech).

A restaurant menu.

When was the last time you saw someone wash one off? Exactly.

Your smartphone.

Not-so-fun fact: The average phone harbors more germs than a toilet seat.

The gym.

Scientists found rhinoviruses (the bugs behind the common cold) on 63% of gym equipment at the fitness centers where they tested.

Reduce your risk:

In a recent study, those who stuck to a strict cleanliness protocol including hand-washing decreased their odds of catching a cold or the flu by 77%. This is the most important habit.

SNEAKY WAYS TO OUTSMART GERMS

Wash your hands with soap and water.

Opt for liquid over a bar, in which icky microbes might be embedded. Squirt a dime-size pool into your palms.

Have a long lather.

Hum "Happy Birthday" twice while rubbing vigorously between your fingers and on both sides of your hands up to your wrists.

Dry with a paper towel.

Jet air dryers have 27 times more bacteria in the air around them than do paper towel dispensers, per a study in the *Journal of Hospital Infection*.

Turn off the faucet with a paper towel.

Use it to open the bathroom door, too.

Moisturize.

Soothe with GH Beauty Lab pick (and Seal holder) Neutrogena Norwegian Formula Hand Cream Fragrance-Free, \$5.



**IS USING HAND
SANITIZER AS
EFFECTIVE
AS WASHING
MY HANDS?**

A: For preventing colds and influenza, yes. For avoiding stomach bugs, no. Use a sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol—that's what is needed to rupture the lipid envelopes of (or, in plain English, kill) some viruses. When families in one study used sanitizers one to three times a day, the germs on their hands and in their houses dropped by 99%.

2

HYDRATE, HYDRATE, HYDRATE — ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU FLY

In low-humidity climates (airplanes!), the mucus lining of your nose and throat becomes dry, leaving you vulnerable to viruses. But if you drink around eight glasses of water each day before the flight and stay hydrated and spritz with saline when in the air, you'll arrive as healthy as when you left.

3

GARGLE

Do it with water for 15 seconds three times in a row; repeat three times a day.

Reduce your risk:

Garglers in a recent study had a nearly 40% decrease in colds.

4

PLAN A GIRLS' NIGHT...

...or a work outing, or a high school reunion. People with six or more types of social connections (family, church, etc.) fend off colds especially well.

Reduce your risk: Those without a wide social circle are four times as likely to get sick.



5

GO TO BED ON TIME

When you're well-rested, your body has more energy to fight off invaders like cold and flu viruses.

Reduce your risk: People who sleep six or fewer hours a night are four times as likely to get colds as those who sleep more than seven hours.

6

EXERCISE, BUT NOT TOO HARD

Intensive running for 90-plus minutes temporarily suppresses your ability to fight bugs. Less rigorous exercise, like a 45-minute daily power walk, boosts immunity.

Reduce your risk: Moderate exercisers are one-third as likely to catch a cold as nonexercisers, finds research in the *American Journal of Medicine*.



7

STOP AFTER JUST ONE GLASS

Excess alcohol can reduce your body's ability to fight off infections for up to 24 hours. (Sorry.)

THE REAL DEAL ON THE FLU SHOT

The flu shot didn't live up to the hype last year (it was only half as effective as was hoped). But laboratory data suggests that this year's shot will be a better match. Getting a flu shot typically decreases your chance of catching the flu by about 50% to 60%. So roll up your sleeve already!

GH'S COLD AND FLU EXPERTS: Sheldon Cohen, Ph.D., psychology professor at Carnegie Mellon University; Charles Gerba, Ph.D., microbiologist and professor at the University of Arizona; Takashi Kawamura, M.D., Ph.D., professor of medicine and epidemiology at Kyoto University; Geeta Maker-Clark, M.D., family physician at NorthShore University HealthSystem; Shawn Westadt Mueller, R.N., director of infection prevention and control at Medstar Union Memorial Hospital; David C. Nieman, DrPH, professor at Appalachian State University; Aric Prather, Ph.D., assistant professor of psychiatry at the University of California, San Francisco; Audrey Tatar, M.D., physician at Northwestern Memorial Hospital; Cornelia Ulrich, Ph.D., professor at the University of Utah