

# How to defend yourself against winter germs

By Jacalynn Kim

An apple a day, keeps the doctor away – especially during the cold and flu season. You can reduce your risk of being sickened by seasonal viruses by boosting your emotional and physical well-being.

Feeding your body right helps prevent illnesses. This includes eating foods with antioxidants, anti-inflammatory properties and food high in vitamin C and D. Apples are a great example. Not only are they in season for the winter, they also provide fiber, vitamin C and are anti-inflammatory.

Other “super” foods can be incorporated into your diet: fish, garlic (at least two cloves per day but you can always add more), onions, ginger, squashes, oranges and lemons.

Soups are a great way to get a warm, fuzzy feeling from a meal while incorporating a lot of different ingredients.

Teas are more than just a warm drink to sip by the fire. Chamomile tea or lemon ginger tea both provide antioxidants and are anti-inflammatory.

Supplements are also a great way to get the nutrients you need in your diet. If you're thinking of taking supplements or are taking supplements, always inform your doctor's office of these supplements at your appointments. Recommendations for boosting the immune system include taking fish oil 2,000 milligrams twice daily, vitamin D 1,000 to 2,000 IU (international units) daily, vitamin C 100-500 milligrams (find sugar free options) or just take a multivitamin. When taking a multivitamin, make sure to avoid doubling up with your other supplements. Consult your doctor before taking more than recommended.

Probiotics containing *Lactobacillus rhamnosus* and *Lactobacillus casei rhamnosus* have also been shown to help prevent viral infections as well as support good gut health.

If you do get sick, zinc lozenges have been shown to help shorten symptom duration.

Getting your body active and outside helps to stave off infections. During the winter, we tend to spend more time indoors, leading to decreased exercise, less time spent socializing and less sun exposure. All of these can take a toll on our mental and physical health, making us more susceptible to viral infections.

Winter is a perfect time to try new activities to stay active, such as cross-country skiing, yoga, tai chi or working out at the gym. If the weather is nice, go outside for a walk, hike, play pickleball, tennis or golf. Billings offers a lot of parks that cater to these activities. Two Moon Park and Norm's Island offer cross-country skiing, if there is enough snow. They are also great places to just go for a walk. Pioneer Park and Rose Park offer tennis courts and also have walking trails.

If the outdoors is not what you're into, find exercise videos online.

Boost your outlook and your health by spending time with family and friends or meeting new friends during winter. Be respectful of your health and others by staying in if you're feeling sick and washing your hands frequently.

Montana's flu season usually continues into early March. Safe, effective influenza vaccinations and COVID-19 vaccinations are available for everyone over the age of six months. Check with your local pharmacy or clinic or call RiverStone Health Immunization Clinic 406-247-3382 for an appointment.

*Dr. Jacalynn Kim, a family physician at RiverStone Health Clinic, can be reached at 406-247-3350.*