

It all comes down to Natural Balance...!

Ask a dozen sniffing, sneezing people to talk about the bug they've caught, and you'll likely discover a pattern. Chances are good that before they came down with the cold or flu, they were working long hours, eating on-the-go, getting little sleep, operating at full-speed ahead. While not always the case, many people report that these winter afflictions creep up on them in times of stress, when they're pushing themselves too hard.

According to William Mitchell, N.D., a Seattle-based practitioner who teaches advanced naturopathic therapeutics at Bastyr University, studies show that many viruses and bacteria quietly reside within us until something within the body's internal environment becomes unbalanced. Then they rally into action and attack.

As many longtime yogis can attest, asana practice provides a gentle, natural means of supporting the immune system on a day-to-day basis—no matter how hectic your schedule might be. Yoga helps lower stress hormones that compromise the immune system, while also conditioning the lungs and respiratory tract, stimulating the lymphatic system to oust toxins from the body, and bringing oxygenated blood to the various organs to ensure their optimal function.

“Yoga is unlike other forms of exercise that focus only on certain parts of the body,” says Kathleen Fry, M.D., president of the American Holistic Medicine Association. “Yoga works on everything.” Mitchell, points to a number of poses that can help a practitioner get through a winter cold. Downward Facing Dog encourages blood flow to the sinuses—infact most inverted postures or forward bends will focus the immune system on the sinuses, ultimately helping to ease congestion. These particular types of poses also work to prevent the complications of secondary infections by draining the lungs. If bronchial congestion has you gasping for air, Mitchell suggests you practice Camel Pose, Cow Face Pose, and Child's Pose with arms extended in front, moving into Cobra Pose to open the chest and prevent pneumonia.

Should you come down with the flu, however, it's best not to practice yoga at all, since the condition requires absolute rest. The one exception to this rule, is in the case of fever. Sitting in Easy Pose, with the backs or sides of the hands resting on the knees, thumb and index finger touching in jnana mudra and breathing through a U-shaped tongue for a minimum of three minutes will help reduce a temperature.

So how does one begin an immune-boosting yoga program? Rest assured that whatever your current yoga practice entails, it already strengthens your resistance. But if you want to take extra steps to avoid infection, take this advice from Richard Rosen, instructor at Piedmont Yoga Studio in Oakland, California. He explains that modified versions of forward bends, backbends, and twists can all lend a hand in supporting and strengthening the immune system. Rosen suggests the following key poses, along with a head wrap developed by B.K.S. Iyengar. Practice the sequence regularly throughout the winter to better your chances of staying healthy. And if you do succumb to illness, you'll find these poses provide just the R & R you need to get better.

7 Poses to Relieve Cold & Flu Symptoms

Head Wrap

Before you begin, wrap your forehead to relieve tension in the head. Take a wide ace bandage (about 4 inches) and wrap it snugly around the head, tucking the free end in. You can also wrap it over the eyes, taking care not to wrap the eyes too tightly. The bandage will comfort our congested sinuses while you do the poses that follow.



Supported Bridge Pose

Opens up the chest and increases circulation to the upper torso.

Align two bolsters or two to four blankets on the floor running the entire length of your body (height of the support can vary from 6 to 12 inches). Sit on the middle of the support and lie back. Slide towards your head until your shoulders lightly touch the floor. Open your arms out to the sides, palms turned up. Rest with your legs stretched out on the bolster or with your knees bent and your feet on the floor. Relax for a minimum of five minutes.



Standing Forward Bend (Uttanasana)

Brings energy to the head and respiratory area; helps clear the sinuses. Stand with your feet hip-width apart and rest your forearms on a chair seat. You can also place a blanket on the chair seat for extra padding. Hold two to five minutes.



Supported Bound Angle Pose

Opens the chest, abdomen, and groins; relaxes the nervous system. Sit on the floor, knees bent towards the chest. Bring the soles of your feet together and let your knees open towards the floor. Support the outer thighs with folded blankets at a comfortable height. You can also place sandbags on each inner thigh to deepen relaxation. Release the arms out to the sides and let go of any tension. Relax in the pose for a minimum of five minutes.



Legs Up the Wall Pose

Brings energy to the groin and opens the chest area to facilitate breathing. With the back of the pelvis on a bolster placed 4 to 6 inches from the wall, swing the legs up the wall. Drop your sitting bones into the space between the blanket and the wall and open your arms out to the sides. If your hamstrings feel tight, try turning the legs slightly in, or move the bolster further away from the wall. Hold for a minimum of five minutes.



Widespread Forward Bend

Quiets the internal organs; relaxes the mind. Sit on the floor with your sitting bones on the edge of a folded blanket. Straighten your legs out in front of you and then separate them as far as you comfortably can. Rest your upper torso on a bolster or (if you're more stiff) a chair seat. If you are using a chair, you can fold your forearms on the seat for more height and padding. Hold the pose for three to five minutes.



Reclining Twist

Releases physical and stress-based tension. Lie on your back and with an exhalation bend your knees and draw your thighs to your torso. Shift your pelvis slightly to the left and, with another exhalation, swing your legs to the right and down to the floor (if they don't rest comfortably on the floor, support them on a bolster or folded blanket). Turn your upper torso to the left. Rest your right hand on the outer left knee and stretch your left arm to the side, in line with your shoulders. Look straight up or close your eyes. Relax for three minutes. Repeat on the other side.



Ever wonder why some of us fall constant prey to seasonal colds and flu, while others waltz through winter without so much as a sniffle? If you find yourself among the bed-ridden, you can certainly lay some blame on the fact that viruses thrive in cold, damp conditions. Your body, meanwhile, must adapt to winter's climactic changes at a time when you're spending your days mostly indoors in close contact with others. But that still doesn't answer the question you're probably pondering: Why me?

Compelling new research has some scientists now arguing that colds and flu aren't just a simple matter of viral exposure. A recent study at UCLA revealed that subjecting healthy people to someone contaminated with a cold for 48 hours did not give the healthy subjects a cold. The conclusion? Colds result not from a cold virus, but from "an internal disturbance of the body's immune system," according to the researchers. Before figuring out how, in addition to yoga, you can bolster your defenses, it helps to understand what you're dealing with—and how your body defends itself.

Colds and flu wreak havoc in different ways. The common cold may be caused by a number of viruses, some of which can lead to secondary bacterial infections such as bronchitis, strep throat, and pneumonia. Cold viruses inflame the mucous membranes lining the upper respiratory system. The flu virus, on the other hand, comes in three different strains and infects the entire respiratory tract. The flu, therefore, has a higher capability of leading to serious complications. As you probably know first-hand, colds and flu quickly throw a well-ordered immune system into chaos. But while the prevailing onslaught of symptoms (coughing, sneezing, congestion, runny nose) may be uncomfortable, they signal a counterattack being waged by the body against the viral intruder. As William Mitchell, N.D., explains, the body tries to make life unpleasant enough for a virus

Cold & Flu Insurance

Rather than rely on cold medicines to suppress symptoms, tune up your immune system and help your body heal itself this winter. If you're looking for a way to bolster defenses, natural remedies are a good place to start. Herbal treatments work as immunotonics to help reinforce, balance, and strengthen the immune system. Some herbs prevent infections while others stop an infection or speed recovery.

Beta Carotene Improves tissue integrity. Take 25,000 IU daily, and you'll experience fewer colds.

Vitamin B A deficiency in folic acid has been shown to cause atrophy of the thymus and lymph glands. A lowpotency B formula with B1, B2, B5, B12, and folic acid covers the bases. Vegetarians who get a lot of colds or flu should take extra B12 and folic acid.

Vitamin C Take up to 5,000mg per day before cold and flu season and throughout. Try ascorbate, which is buffered, if diarrhea is a problem. Vitamin C is water-soluble, so any surplus gets excreted through urine, rather than stored in body fat tissue like vitamin A and other fat-soluble vitamins.

Vitamin E 400 IU daily, found in soybeans and grains such as whole wheat, enhances and activates the immune system's T cell function.

Selenium 200mcg daily helps promote the development and activity of all kinds of white blood cells.

Zinc Some research shows that supplementation in spring and fall can help ward off colds by building up immune proteins. Take 50mg per day. —

Stop Sniffles before They Start

When it comes to colds and flu, prevention is the best medicine. Popularized treatments such as echinacea activate Tcells and macrophages, improve antibody binding, increase the circulation of white blood cells, and enhance killer Tcell activity. Study findings reported by the Herb Research Foundation show that echinacea can even increase the consumption of invading organisms by 20 to 40 percent.

Aside from homeopathic remedies, you have other natural means of symptom relief at your disposal. For a sinus infection, place a hot water bottle covered with a castor oil-soaked cloth over the sinus area for 20 to 40 minutes. For respiratory infections, try licorice, which has antiviral properties. Or try a soothing mix of licorice root, gum weed, and bloodroot for a dry cough and sore throat.

And perhaps most important, according to the American Council on Exercise, physical activity increases natural killer cell activity. Even one bout of exercise can boost immune function for several hours afterwards, and this short-term boost appears to reduce risk of infection in the long term. All of this makes it clear that when it comes to colds and flu, the best offense is a good defense. Granted, some viruses will prevail despite your best efforts. But by integrating the elements of healthy living into your daily life, you can achieve a natural balance between mind and body that enriches immune function.