

7 ways to stay healthy at work

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While it might feel like summer, cold and flu season are just around the corner. Stocking up on vitamins may seem like the smart thing to do, but are your wellness methods up to date? We asked Dr. Yael Halaas, an ear, nose and throat doctor based in New York City, to clarify fact and fiction when it comes to fending off those co-worker cooties.

"We can't get rid of the common cold entirely, but there are ways to shorten its duration," Halaas said.

Here are Halaas' tips for staying healthy.

Think zinc. Rather than grabbing the vitamin C or echinacea, Halaas said zinc is a more proven way to fight germs.

"Studies show that zinc, particularly zinc gluconate, will shorten the duration [of a cold] by about 42 percent," Halaas said.

Halaas recommends you take it by mouth. She said you can get zinc from oysters, but if those aren't handy, there are many forms available over the counter.

"Just be sure it says 'zinc gluconate' on the packaging and not just 'zinc,'" she said.

Treat it right. Halaas said that people often confuse allergies for a cold and mistreat their symptoms.

"Antihistamines are for allergies, not for congestion from a cold," Halaas said. "When fall comes around people start to sniffle, they often take the antihistamines thinking it's just an allergy kicking in but those which won't help with cold congestion. You need a decongestant that contains pseudoephedrine, but be cautious taking these if you have high blood pressure."

Eat yogurt. "Some recent data says that probiotics can help keep you well," she said. "Probiotics interfere with toxin and cell-binding sites, which prevents germs from invading the GI tract as much."

Buy a humidifier. "One of the reasons we don't get as many colds in the summer is because hot, humid air bogs down the transmission of the virus," she said. "The humidifier will moisten the membranes and loosen the mucus. It's soothing."

Flush your nose with saline solution. An over-the-counter saline spray can help, Halaas said. "This is good for cleaning out and moving things around," she said. "But don't get nasal [decongestant] spray. Your nose can get addicted to those. You want to be flushing things out, not medicating. You can also use a neti pot, which are available at most pharmacies."

Bring in chicken soup for lunch. As clichéd as this may sound, Halaas said there is some truth to grandma's old standby. "There has been some evidence that chicken soup does help boost part of the immune system," she said. "Plus it has some protein and it's soothing to eat."

Be happy. "Studies have shown that having a positive attitude will help you stay well," she said. "If you have good stress release mechanisms, this will help tremendously."