

Cold Myths

Feed a cold, starve a fever. Get inside before you catch your death of cold. Don't forget your vitamins. Wash your hands!

No, we haven't been talking to your Nona, but the endless task of wiping noses might have us hearing voices. In the thick of cold and flu season, we'll try anything, but it might be more prudent to separate old wives' tales from medically-sound advice.

Feed a cold, starve a fever. In sickness or in health, it's never a good idea to deprive yourself of nutrients. Nutritionists and doctors agree: the best way to stay healthy and help your body get well is to eat plenty of fruits and vegetables and drink lots of fluids.

An unzipped jacket or hatless head is an invitation to pneumonia. Leslie Solomonian, naturopathic doctor and savvy mom of two (Noah, 5 and Rachel, 7 months), says being out in the cold air without a hat or coat doesn't have any bearing on whether or not you'll encounter a virus. The only way to catch a cold is when a virus enters your respiratory system through droplets in the air (think messy sneezers) or dirty hands. However, she cautions that heading outdoors without proper outerwear does mean the body will be more preoccupied with staying warm than staving off viruses.

Take vitamin C when you feel a cold coming on. Though vitamin C does help bolster the immune response, Leslie tells us that taking it when you're already feeling sick won't affect the duration or intensity of the cold. She recommends making sure you're getting enough vitamin C and other important vitamins and minerals through a steady diet of fruits and vegetables.

Lower a fever. When a virus or infection enters the body, all kinds of artillery are brought out to beat it back. As the battle heats up, so does our temperature. Unfortunately, the knee-jerk reaction to a warm forehead is to break out the acetaminophen. But Leslie says that when we take away the fever we may be disabling the body's ability to fight infection. In fact, in medical circles, a mild fever is a good sign that the body is doing its job. Of course, if your child is lethargic, listless, prone to seizures or the temperature persists beyond five days, you should consult your doctor.

The bottom line is that nothing beats good old-fashioned hygiene when it comes to preventing colds and flu. Washing your hands regularly, sneezing into your shoulder and eating plenty of fruits and vegetables – including the proverbial chicken soup – all contribute to your overall well-being more than a fistful of vitamins ever could. Maybe Nona knew best after all.