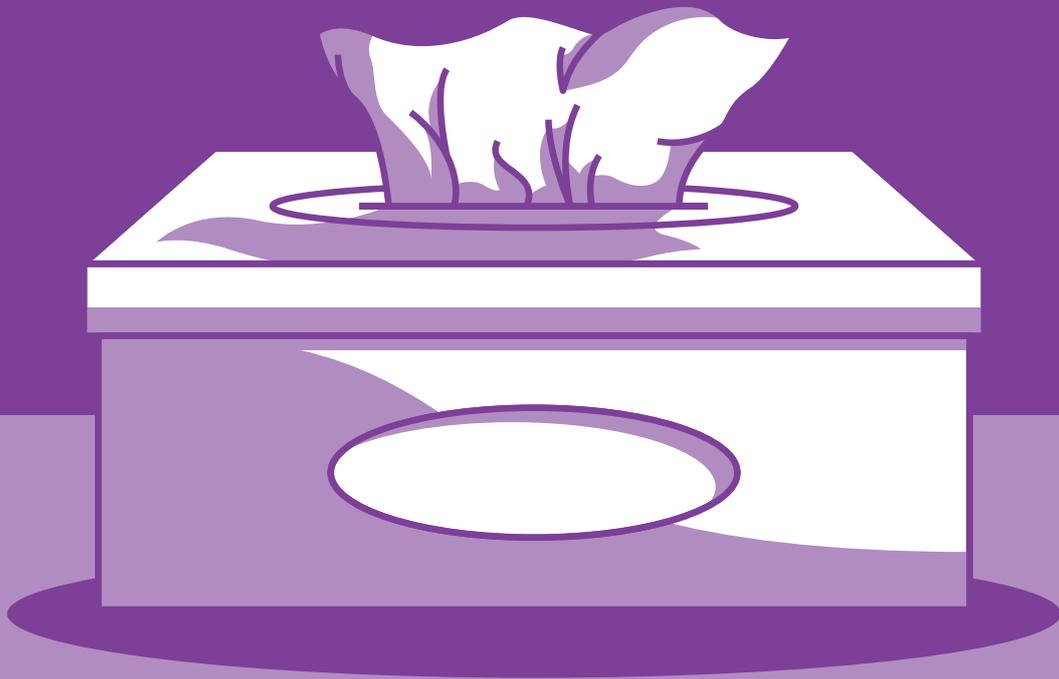


Beat the bugs:

10 tips to prevent and manage flu
and other seasonal viruses





Wherever we live, flu and cold viruses exist, and no one is completely immune. In most countries, the flu season peaks when temperatures drop and humidity is low. So, if you've relocated for work, you may find that cold and flu bugs are around at a different time of year.

In the Northern Hemisphere, flu season usually starts in October and peaks in December before ending in March, but in the Southern Hemisphere, it lasts from June to September. In the Tropics, flu can be a year-round issue. Although most flu cases have a seasonal pattern, it's possible to catch the flu at any time. And if you live and work in a big city, a recent [study](#) has suggested that the flu season lasts longer.

Read our guide to keeping flu and seasonal viruses at bay. And if you're unlucky enough to catch the flu, a cold or a winter bug, learn how to look after yourself by following these tips:

1. Get an annual flu jab

When expat executive Paul relocated from the UK to Singapore with his family, he wasn't sure whether he'd need a flu vaccination, or even whether a flu season existed there. In the UK, Paul's employer had paid for a flu jab because he wasn't entitled to free one on the National Health Service (NHS). [Singapore](#), with its tropical climate, has flu year-round, and a high number of cases. Paul realised that he and his family would benefit from being vaccinated.

Guidance on flu vaccines varies from country to country, but throughout the world, experts agree that flu vaccinations are not only safe, they are the best way to reduce the likelihood of catching the virus. Singapore follows the [WHO](#) vaccination policy, which says that vaccines benefit all. However, young children, pregnant women, healthcare workers, older adults and people with chronic diseases or weakened immune systems are particularly at risk of complications, so should be immunised as a priority.

We need to be immunised annually because flu viruses evolve, and our immunity wanes over time. The best time to get the vaccine is at the beginning of the flu season, but if you're not sure when it's best to be immunised, talk to your doctor or a pharmacist.

2. Practise good personal hygiene

Wash your hands frequently and encourage family members to do the same. [Studies](#) show that regular handwashing with soap is one of the most effective ways to reduce the chances of catching cold and flu viruses and passing them on. Seasonal bugs spread when tiny droplets from coughs or sneezes travel in the air and land on surfaces, where they can survive for up to 24 hours if they are not washed away. If you don't have access to soap, then hand sanitiser gel will do.

In some Asian countries, particularly in Japan and China, people wear face masks to prevent the spread of flu. Paul wasn't sure if his employer would suggest he do the same, but they are less common in Singapore. Deciding whether to wear a face mask is probably a matter of personal choice, with some [guidelines](#) recommending them. If you wear one, change it a couple of times a day, more often if it gets wet.

As well as practising good hygiene and getting vaccinated, we can give our bodies the best chance of defending themselves against viruses with a healthy immune system. For our immune systems to work well, we should:



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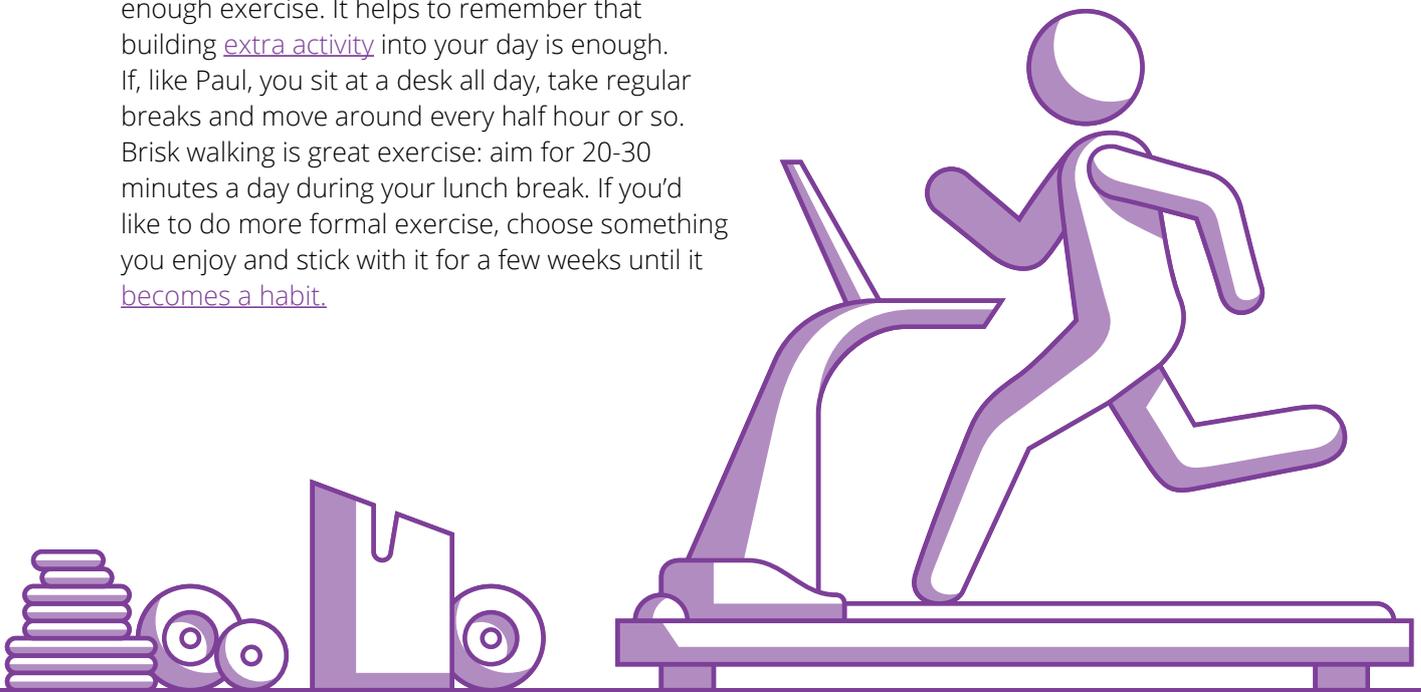
3. Get enough sleep.

We can help our bodies to fight off invading germs by [getting enough rest](#). Everyone's different, but most adults need 7-8 hours of [sleep](#) a night.



4. Exercise regularly.

Although it sounds easy, most of us don't get enough exercise. It helps to remember that building [extra activity](#) into your day is enough. If, like Paul, you sit at a desk all day, take regular breaks and move around every half hour or so. Brisk walking is great exercise: aim for 20-30 minutes a day during your lunch break. If you'd like to do more formal exercise, choose something you enjoy and stick with it for a few weeks until it [becomes a habit](#).



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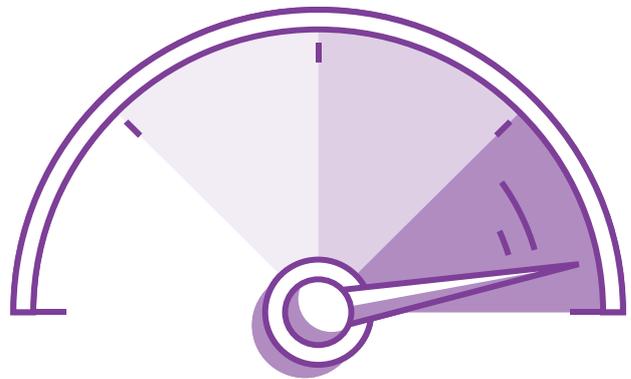
5. Eat a variety of foods.

Eating 5-7 portions of fruits and vegetables daily is one of the easiest ways to stay healthy. Fruit and veg contain valuable vitamins and minerals, so including plenty of them in your meals prevents deficiency and keeps our immune systems working well. [Eating well](#) isn't a sure-fire way to stop yourself from getting the flu, but it will help to keep you in good health. Fruit and veg are also high in fibre, and a recent animal [study](#) found that a high-fibre diet could help protect against the flu.



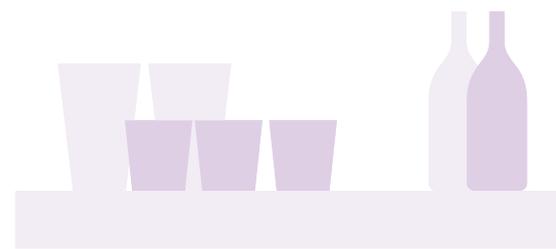
6. Manage stress

Relocating to a different country and being far from friends and support networks can play havoc with your stress levels. Being aware of the signs of stress is a first step, the next is taking steps to manage it. Remember that not all stress is bad. We need some in our lives to be productive, but too much can make us exhausted and ill. If you think your stress levels need addressing, talk to someone. This could be a family member, your doctor or a counsellor. If work is the problem, talk to your line manager and don't suffer in silence. Read our tips for ways to [ease your stress levels](#).



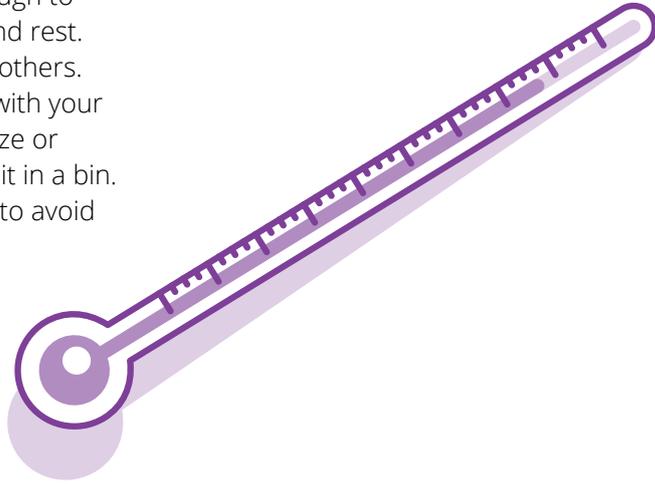
7. Watch your alcohol intake

Tempting as it is to wind down with a few drinks after work, try not to make it a daily habit. When you drink alcohol, keep an eye on your units. Not only does too much alcohol weaken our immune systems and make us more [vulnerable to infections](#), it disrupts sleep and affects our productivity the following day.



8. Look after yourself

If you're unlucky enough to come down with the flu, you'll need to rest until you feel better. If you've just got a light cold, you may be well enough to work. But if you have a fever, go home and rest. It's worth thinking about your impact on others. Do you really want to share your germs with your co-workers? While resting at home, sneeze or cough into a clean tissue and dispose of it in a bin. Don't share towels with family members to avoid infecting them.



9. Treat your symptoms

If you have aches, a fever or chills, take paracetamol to lower your temperature and feel better. Follow the directions on the packet and don't take more than four doses in 24 hours. Rest and fluids will ease your symptoms and let your body heal itself. Drink plenty of water throughout the day and, if you feel tired, rest or nap.





10. See a doctor

Flu is managed differently from country to country. In some, it's commonplace to see a doctor. In others, a doctor will tell you to manage your symptoms at home. One thing's certain – if you or anyone in your family comes down with the flu and is in an at-risk group for complications, make sure you get medical advice early on.

Your doctor may recommend antivirals to fight the flu, which should be taken within 48 hours of the onset of symptoms. Most people recover well, but complications can happen. If your symptoms get worse, or last a week without improving, see a doctor as soon as you can.

Talk your employer today to find out more about their sick leave policies and your health and wellness plan benefits.

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