

## Exercise: An Immunity Boost

Many things affect immune system function and fortitude. Normally, the immune system is incredibly effective at fighting off invaders like common colds and the flu. Add everyday stressors and poor diet and lack of physical activity to the mix and those tiny invaders have a better chance of making you their home. Avoid these “bugs” by *exercising* your immune muscles to avoid the achy, congested, feverish, can’t-get-out-of-bed symptoms that come with many common colds and the flu.

Research tells us that regular exercise in any form can boost immune function:

**Why:**

50% - 300% greater antibody response and killer T cell release to combat foreign invaders by, which could help decrease the number of colds you get.

**What:**

The physical activity necessary to enhance immune function can be less intense and shorter than is required for cardiovascular benefits.

**How:**

Just 20 – 30 minutes of brisk walking five days weekly is enough to boost the immune system.

Fighting the common cold or flu isn’t the only benefit of regular exercise. Other research indicates a link between regular exercise and making room for more of the immune system T cells that help the fight against cancer.

Still newer evidence points toward the help a bout of exercise can do for the effectiveness of a flu vaccine. Not only does increased blood flow during exercise help transport the vaccine throughout the body, exercise also helps activate the immune system to produce more flu antibodies.

Finally, exercise isn’t just for prevention; it’s also a piece of recovery when it comes to the common cold. And when you’re fighting a cold, harnessing all of the immune-boosting power you can may help that cold and its symptoms make an early exit. Remember, though, to listen to your body. Decongestants and other cold medicines can increase heart rate. Plus, heart rate is increased by exercise. The combination could cause shortness of breath or other symptoms. Finally, exercising too vigorously puts extra stress on the body, making it even more difficult for your body to overcome that cold. Be smart and stick to 20 – 30 minutes of moderate-intensity activity (e.g. brisk walking, light swimming, easy bicycling, and the like). If you have concerns or a medical condition to consider, consult a medical care provider before exercising.

Sources: WebMD: <http://www.webmd.com/cold-and-flu/cold-guide/exercise-when-you-have-cold>

Popular Science: <http://www.popsci.com/science/article/2013-01/how-exercise-toughens-your-flu-shot>

**For more information, contact the author:** Kayte Tranel, MS, RD, Extension Educator at [ktranel2@unl.edu](mailto:ktranel2@unl.edu). This publication has been peer reviewed. Visit the Walk Nebraska Website at <http://walknebraska.org>

**Know how. Know now.**



Extension is a Division of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln cooperating with the Counties and the United States Department of Agriculture.

University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension educational programs abide with the nondiscrimination policies of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and the United States Department of Agriculture.