



### Take steps against colds

If you survived the last few months of 2003 without catching a cold, there are things you can do to help maintain that trend into 2004. If you are one of the masses who has already fallen victim, the same things can help protect you from catching another cold.

**Question:** If you've already had a cold, can you catch another one?

**Answer:** Yes. Most colds are caused by one of more than 100 rhinoviruses. So even if your immune system handled one virus, it doesn't mean you are immune to all the others.

A second group of viruses -- coronaviruses -- includes the SARS virus. Coronaviruses are thought to cause 10 percent to 15 percent of colds. Even some influenza viruses can cause colds.

**Q:** How do people pick up a cold virus?

**A:** The most common way is to pick up a virus on your hands by touching a contaminated surface, then passing the virus into your body by touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Contaminated surfaces may include

other people's hands, door-knobs, handrails, etc.

A virus may also be inhaled. Coughs and sneezes can spray an invisible aerosol of tiny fluid particles into the air that allows viruses to float around for some time. Influenza viruses are thought to travel mainly by aerosols.

**Q:** How can you avoid catching colds?

**A:** The three most important things to do are: 1) avoid areas in which sick people are coughing and sneezing; 2) wash hands frequently; 3) do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth except when hands are well washed.

**Q:** Can supplements help?

**A:** Few theories are backed up with research. For example, some studies show that zinc lozenges and nasal gels can shorten the duration of a cold and reduce symptoms, if taken at the first sign of symptoms.

One study of school-age children found that taking one zinc gluconate glycine lozenge (Cold-Eeze) per day reduced the chance of catching a cold by 25 percent compared with those

on the placebo.

But caution should be taken because excess zinc can cause anemia and kidney problems.

The herb echinacea has been promoted as a cold treatment, but a well-designed study on schoolchildren just published in the Journal of the American Medical Association reported no benefit.

Some garlic supplements have been shown to reduce the incidence of colds. In one study, individuals taking a garlic supplement had fewer colds over a 12-week period, and cold symptoms were less severe.

Research on the efficacy of vitamin C in fighting the common cold has gone on for 30 years, yet controversy remains. A recent research review article found that large daily doses of vitamin C do not appear to prevent colds, but that supplements may slightly reduce the duration of symptoms.

With no guarantees, the bottom line comes down to maintaining good overall health and avoiding exposure to viruses.

---

Alan Titchenal, Ph.D, CNS and Joannie Dobbs, Ph.D, CNS  
are nutritionists in the Department of Human Nutrition, Food and Animal Sciences,  
College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources, UH-Manoa.  
Dr. Dobbs also works with the University Health Service.

---