

# ILLNESS-RELATED PRECAUTIONS



## Helping Seniors – and Yourself – Stay Safer

**Recommendations to wash your hands for at least 20 seconds, avoid touching your face, and keep a safe distance of 6 feet have become all too common, and can serve us all well now and for years to come during cold and flu seasons. But there is more we can do.**

In your concern about avoiding illness, remember that if you are a caregiver, you are also at increased risk. Caregivers are notably tired and worn down, and are just as susceptible to the cold, flu, and current COVID-19 pandemic. The consequences can be wide-reaching. If you have to remove yourself from the home for an extended period of time or call in unexpected respite care, these changes can be stressful for your loved one and can further open them up to the chance to fall ill.

What else can we work into our daily routines that will help us all stay safer, especially seniors and the immunocompromised?



### Other precautions you can take include:



**Exercise.** Physical activity can boost your immune system and can reduce the risk of a cold by 33%.



**Sanitize** mobile devices, keyboards, doorknobs, and light switches regularly.



**Drink** plenty of liquids. Water and hot tea can help the nasal passages stay moist and can trap germs before they enter the body. Note that seniors have 10 to 15 percent less water in their bodies than when they were younger, allowing dehydration to onset much more quickly.



**Eat** a varied diet that includes protein, which can help boost the immune response. Consider adding fish, eggs, or yogurt to your diet.



**Get a flu shot.** Flu vaccines change each year and it's important to stay current on your vaccine regimen. Last year's vaccine may not protect you this year. The CDC recommends that people get a flu vaccine by the end of October.

Source: [Daily Caring](#)



### Did you Know

Did you know that chicken soup does actually help? The steam helps open nasal passages. The broth soothes the throat. The protein from the soup helps infection-fighting white blood cells do their job!

Source: [Daily Caring](#)

Despite our best efforts, we may still get ill. If you or your senior are starting to feel the symptoms of cold or flu, it's important to see the doctor. For older adults, if antiviral medications are prescribed, starting them within 2 days of getting sick could mean the difference between mild flu or severe pneumonia.

## Some things to do to help your ill senior:

**Ensure adequate sleep.** Sleep is important and restorative. Prop your loved one up at a 45-degree angle. This can help keep draining fluids from settling in their sinus cavities and causing worse infections.



**Practice social distancing,** even in the home. It is in everyone's best interest in the home that you separate the patient as much as possible, even if they want your care and comfort. Provide them with ample medication and tissues and then spend most of your time in a different room for at least the first 2-3 days, which are the most contagious.



**Provide adequate ventilation.** A cold breeze blowing on a sick person isn't good but opening windows in other rooms will help move the particulates outside and bring fresh, clean air in for everyone to breathe more freely.



**Continue to practice the good eating and drinking habits** that you started before they got sick.



Once they're feeling better, they may be eager to get back out into the world. They may be contagious for over 5 days after symptoms appear and, in the case of viruses like COVID-19, you might be contagious after being in contact with your loved one for 2 weeks prior to symptoms appearing. Limit any outside contact during this time.

Source: [Daily Caring](#) and [Sixty and Me](#)

## Stomach Flu

Did you know that the stomach flu is actually not influenza at all? Many people use the term "stomach flu" to describe illness with nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea. While these can be related to a flu, mostly in children, they are rarely the main symptoms of any strains of influenza. A flu vaccine will not keep these at bay.



Source: [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)



## Cold Versus Flu

The flu is different from a cold. Cold symptoms are usually milder than flu symptoms, and people with colds are more likely to have a runny or stuffy nose than people with the flu. Common symptoms of the flu include:

- Fever or chills (older adults may not have a fever)
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Vomiting and diarrhea (more common in children)

Source: [Health in Aging](#)