

RUNNER'S WORLD

10 Ways To Avoid Getting Sick During The Holidays

'Tis the season for sniffles. Here's how to avoid germs, stop viruses, and boost your immune system all winter long.

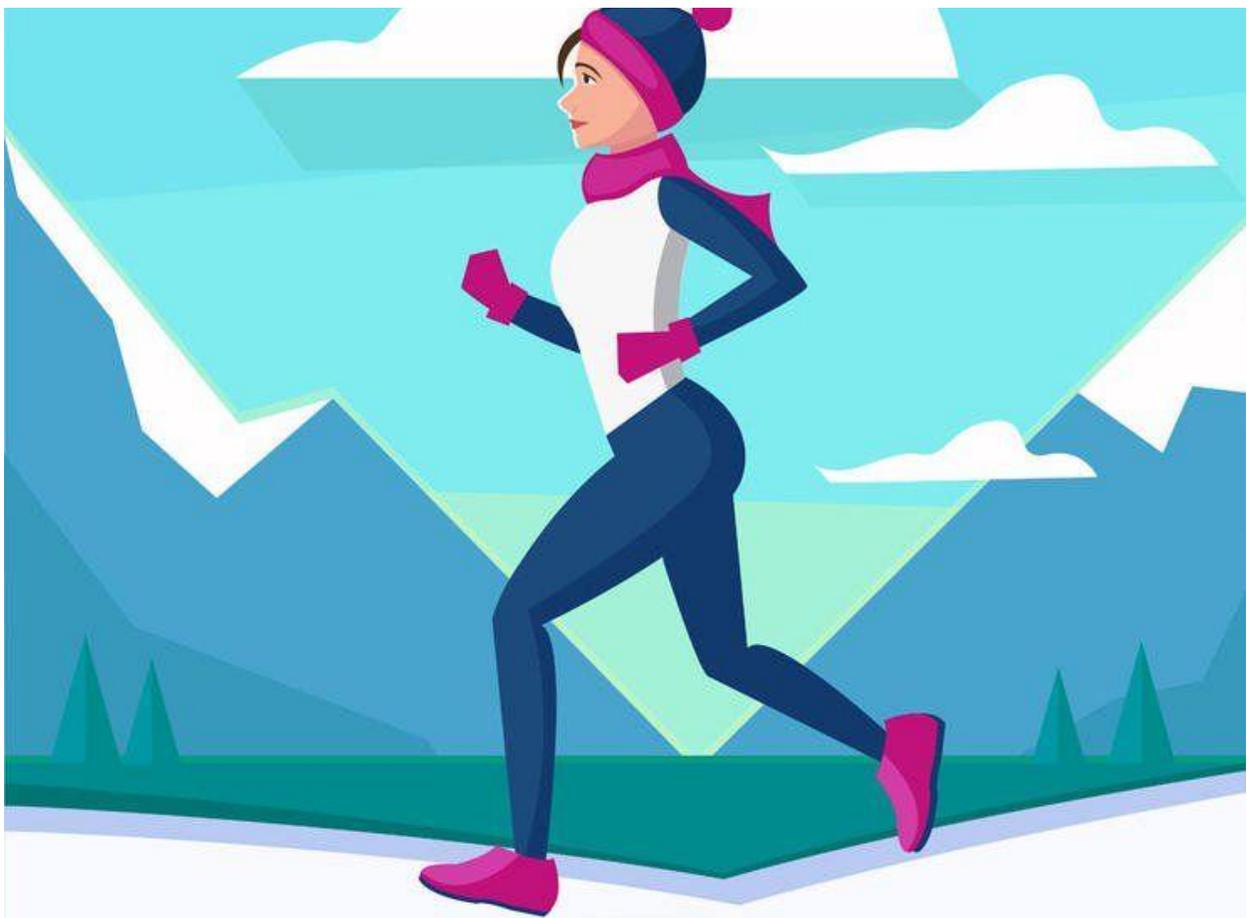


BY [KAREN CICERO](#) DEC 13, 2016



The holidays can be wonderful. There are plenty of [turkey trots](#) and [santa runs](#) to keep you motivated (as well as the [#RWRunStreak](#) of course), there's all that [cool running gear](#) you're giving (or hoping to get) for presents. It truly is a magical time—unless you get sidelined with a sore throat, runny nose, or something worse.

“Your immune system is weaker because you're stressed, skipping workouts, and not eating right, and then you're confronted with all the germs at crowded stores and big parties,” explains Nieca Goldberg, MD, medical director of the Joan H. Tisch Center for Women's Health at the New York University Langone Medical Center. But sniffing away the season isn't inevitable. Use these strategies, and you'll ring in the New Year on a healthy note.



Move (or Keep) Your Workout Outdoors

Ironically, going to the gym can increase your chances of spending the week between Christmas and New Year's sick in bed, says Laura Cipullo, RD, author of *Women's Health Body Clock Diet* and founder of Lifestyle Lounge, a self-care center in New Jersey. The cringe-worthy stats: 63 percent of gym equipment harbors cold viruses, according to a [study in the *Clinical Journal of Sports Medicine*](#). Weights are more likely to be contaminated than treadmills or stationary bikes. "Run or bike around your neighborhood instead," suggests Cipullo. "By doing so, you'll also get a healthy dose of vitamin D from sunlight, which will [boost your immune system](#)." If you have no time to work out during the day, opt for a nighttime fitness class that doesn't require equipment, or book a yoga class and bring your own mat.

Related: [The Surprising Side Effect of a Winter Hike](#)



Order Gifts And Groceries Online

You also want to minimize the time you spend in crowded stores and supermarkets, says Goldberg. Shopping carts in particular are a bacterial breeding ground. One [study](#) at the University of Arizona in Tuscan turned up colistrom bacteria on 72 percent of grocery-store carts and E. Coli on more than 20 percent of them.

When you do go shopping out, consider cleaning the cart handles with an antibacterial wipe. Some chains such as Whole Foods Market and Target even provide them near the cart stands.



Take Precautions At Parties

You might be worried about shaking hands with other guests, but that greeting probably isn't the biggest transmitter of sickness at holiday parties. What is? Buffets.

Once food is left at room temperature for more than two hours, its bacteria levels may become high enough to cause a food-borne illness, a.k.a. a stomach virus. Make your plate at the beginning of the party to help avoid the risk. And if a food like shrimp cocktail, that's supposed to be cold, feels lukewarm—don't eat it. (And don't bother with these [5 totally useless things we all do to avoid germs.](#))

Related: [Try These Foods to Strengthen Immune System](#)



Wash Your Hands Correctly

Suppose you've touched a surface that contains strep bacteria. You're not doomed for the worst sore throat of your life! If you lather up with soap and warm water and scrub for at least 20 seconds, you can remove germs from your hands before they enter your body, says Goldberg. She suggests

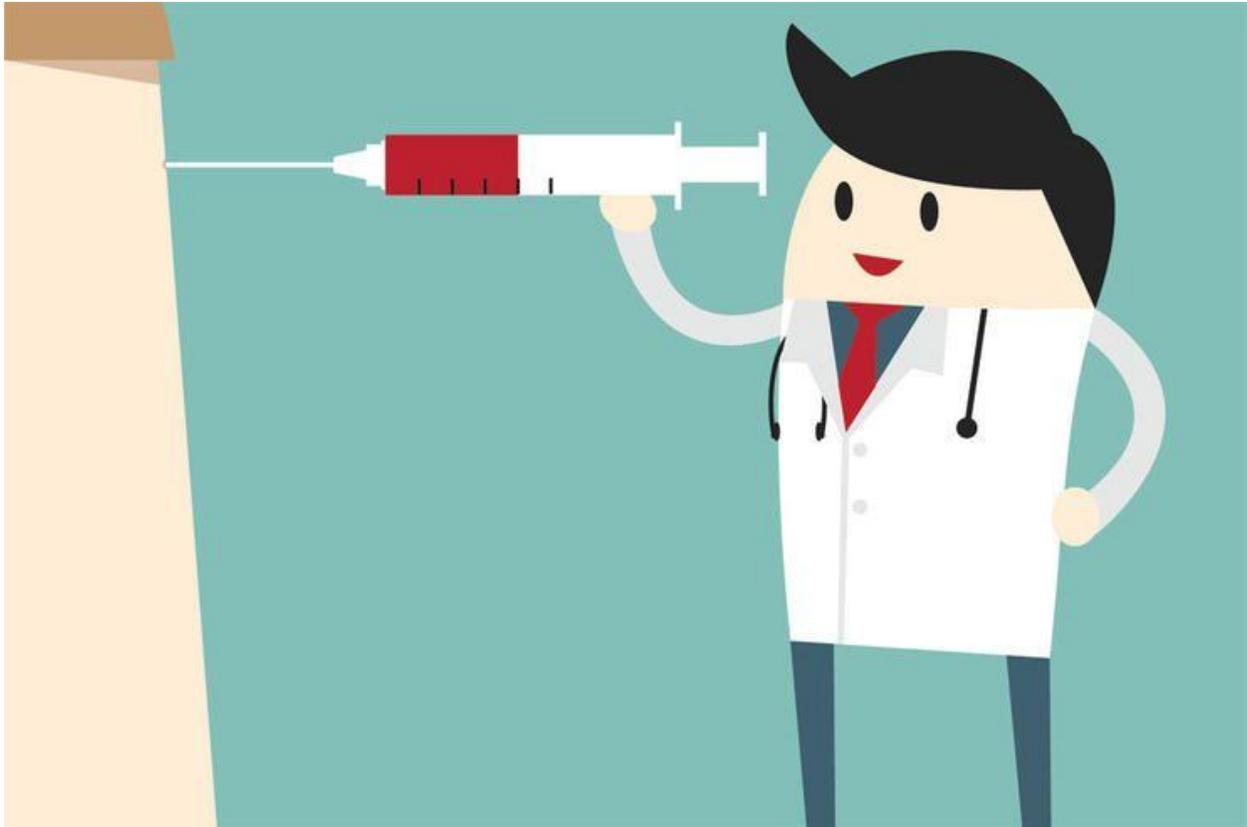
washing your hands more frequently in the weeks leading up to the holidays. No sink around? “Hand sanitizer is better than nothing,” she says.

Related: [9 Supplements For Cold + Flu Season](#)



Don't Touch Your Face So Much

Germs can't enter your body until you touch your mouth, eyes, or nose. So try to break yourself of that unconscious habit. One [study](#) from the National Institutes of Health found that people touch their face in public more than three times an hour—cutting that back will reduce the chances that you give yourself a cold, especially if you're washing your hands regularly.



Get A Flu Shot

“It’s the top thing you can do to protect yourself from being out of commission for a week or more,” says Goldberg. It takes about two weeks after vaccination for the antibodies to develop in your body, so get a shot right away. It’s so easy to check this off your to-do list, too—you can walk into most major drugstores with a pharmacy department and get vaccinated on the spot.

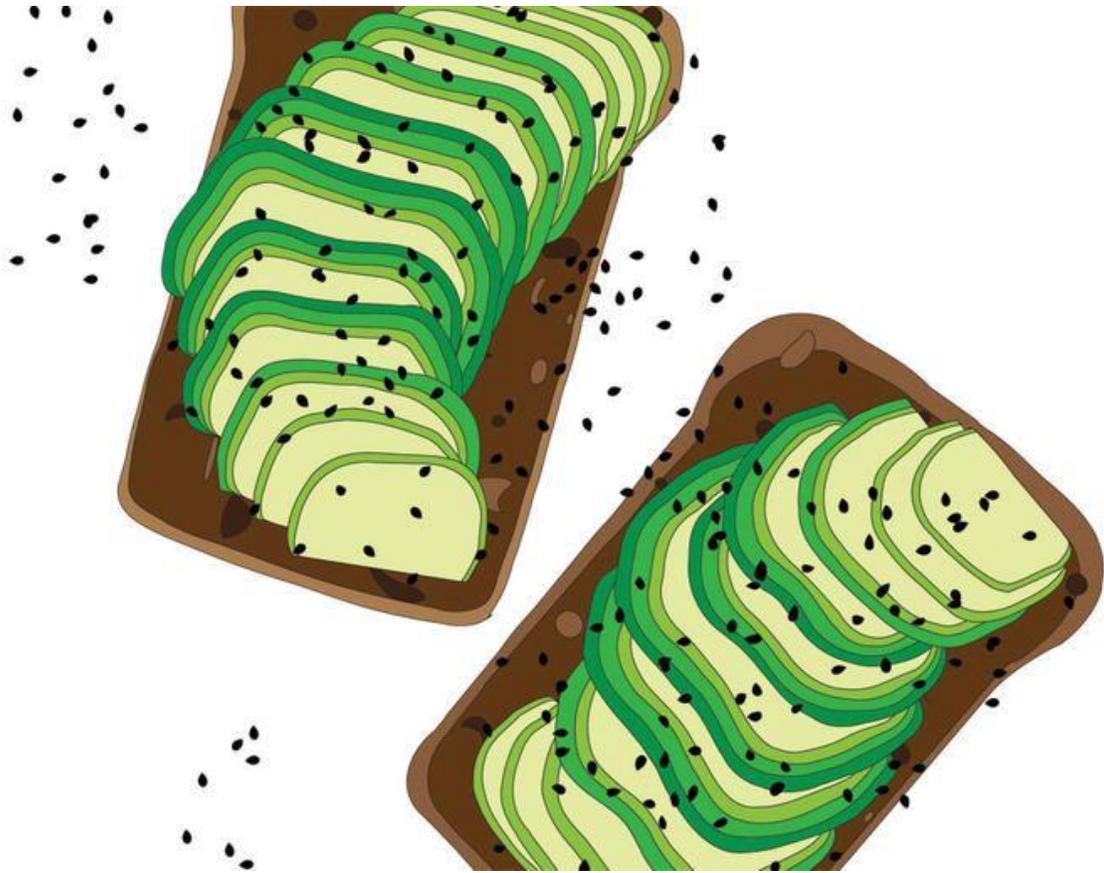


Simplify The Season

Since the stress hormone corticosteroid makes your immune system effective, think about what would make you calmer in the next couple of weeks, suggests Goldberg. “If you traditionally cook a lot for a party at your place, consider making it a potluck this year,” she suggests. Try [going for a meditation run](#) to help keep yourself calm and to reduce stress.

Also avoid gift overload, especially if you have kids. One strategy: Limit each child to four presents—something wanted, something needed, something to wear, and something to read. Or skip the gifts completely this year; [here are 5 ways to do a present-free holiday](#).

Related: [5 Signs You're Headed For A Holiday Breakdown—And 5 Ways To Stop Stressing So Much](#)



Focus On Unprocessed Foods

One of the least healthy things you can do over the holidays is overindulge (here are [5 tips for avoiding off-season weight gain](#)). At holiday gatherings, fill your plate with produce, nuts, seafood, and lean meats, suggests Cipullo. It's okay to have a treat, but keep your portion reasonable and make sure it's something you really love.

"Make breakfast a priority because it's the one meal that you'll probably be able to have at home almost everyday," she says. Her go-to: sprouted whole-grain toast topped with avocado slices and a hard-boiled egg. (Check out these [30 healthy breakfasts for tasty ideas](#).)



Maintain Your Sleep Schedule

[Sleep](#) is important, especially for runners, but not getting your usual amount of z's can also make you more prone getting sick, says Goldberg. Don't burn yourself out now thinking you're going to catch up after Christmas. Limit yourself to one drink at a party because while alcohol might help you fall asleep faster, it increases the chances that you'll wake up in the middle of the night. (Here are [7 more reasons you can't fall back asleep.](#))

Related: [Banking Sleep Might Make You Faster](#)



Take Time For Yourself

Take regular time out to avoid the mall, kitchen, and party circuit, and just to focus on you. “Treat yourself to a massage or even just a warm bath,” suggests Goldberg. Or just get outside and go for a run. After all, according to a [study](#) at Carnegie Mellon University, happy people are more immune to colds. These [5 amazing benefits of being kinder to yourself](#) will help convince you.

The article [10 Ways To Avoid Getting Sick During The Holidays](#) originally appeared on Rodale’s Organic Life.