

## LIFE HEALTH

# Sleep to fight off colds



By Melissa Carr, Special to 24 hours  
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The end of summer often forecasts the beginning of cold and flu season. While living healthy isn't a guarantee to avoid getting sick, it does help. It would probably not surprise you that getting enough sleep and eating healthy keeps your immune system strong.

According to a 2012 article in the journal *Sleep*, lack of shut-eye can make you more susceptible to getting sick and stay sick longer when exposed to a virus. While you sleep your immune system releases cytokines — protective proteins that increase with

infection and inflammation — but if you are sleep-deprived, you produce less. You also make fewer infection-fighting antibodies. Adults typically need seven to eight hours of sleep, but teenagers may need nine to 10 and children may need 10 or more.

Foods that support a healthy immune system includes the usual range of healthy whole foods. Too much sugar, conversely, suppresses the immune system for at least a few hours after consumption.

Exercise pumps up your immunity by speeding up the circulation of your immune cells to infection sites, by flushing out bacteria from your lungs, by increasing your body temperature to slow down bacterial growth, and by lowering stress hormone production. Overdoing it, however, can actually reduce immune function.

Traditional Chinese medicine has options to speed up recovery, as well as avoid a cold from taking hold in the first place. For those who get sick often, a commonly prescribed formula is Yu Ping Feng San (Jade Windscreen Powder). One of its main ingredients is huang qi (astragalus), an herb that has been shown to trigger the activation of immune cells. Make sure that you have a qualified practitioner help you to find out what herbs may be right for you. Acupuncture can also help kick up the body's defenses by stimulating immune cell functions, lowering the immunosuppressing effects of stress, and helping manage inflammation.

Dr. Melissa Carr is a registered doctor of traditional Chinese medicine in Vancouver Visit [activetcm.com](http://activetcm.com).

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