Healthy lifestyle secrets

to power up your immune system

Top tips for staying well while globetrotting

Traveling may make you feel mentally and physically drained even when you depart in prime shape. So you best believe you don't want to get sick while on the road. Make these five strategic moves, and you'll feel ready to take on the world.

Wear noise-canceling headphones. Like other external stressors, long-term or high-intensity noise can suppress your immune system. Block out the roaring engine of your plane and other ambient sounds with noise-canceling headphones. Creating a sense of quiet, personal space can reduce your stress and increase comfort. You can also more easily enjoy your music or in-flight entertainment system.

Make road trip pit stops at nature areas. Your "fight or flight" instincts shut down activity in your body that is not essential to your immediate survival, including the immune system. The opposite mode is "rest and digest," and this relaxed condition can be switched on through time in nature.

"When we feel completely safe, our body devotes resources to long-term investments that lead to good health outcomes — growing, reproducing, and building the immune system," says Ming Kuo, an

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environment and behavior researcher at the University of Illinois. "When we are in nature in that relaxed state, and our body knows that it's safe, it invests resources toward the immune system."

Keep vents open. Turbulence on a flight is no fun, but creating some disturbance in the air around your seat may improve air quality. Unlike when your whole plane rocks through the sky, you just need to make a small-scale change using your air vent.

Turn it on medium or low and you could help block virus particles from lingering in the air and force them to the floor faster. Bring a sweater on board if you're concerned about being cold because of the blowing vent.

You can further keep your risk of getting sick to a minimum by wearing a face mask.

A little bottle of essential oil may be just what you need to stay stress-free while traveling. Aromatherapy can send calming messages to your brain. Lavender and chamomile are popular scents for stress relief and relaxation. Plus many aromatherapy bottles are 3.4 ounces or less — small enough to be allowed in your plane carry-on.

Sleep strategically. You may feel like you have no time to sleep with your busy travel plans. But sleep deprivation could leave you not just tired but also sick. People who sleep for fewer than six hours each night are about four times more likely to catch a cold compared to those who get seven hours of sleep or more.

Not getting enough sleep may lead to a weaker immune system because your body doesn't create as many proteins that protect against infection and inflammation.

Improve your rest away from home by building yourself a sleep kit with essentials like a sleep mask and earplugs. Wear loose, comfortable clothing and bring a neck pillow so you can use passenger time to snooze.

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Shower right away. Feeling grimy after a long day of travel? It's time to hit the showers. You can pick up all sorts of gross bacteria or fungi on a plane. So before lying down on your clean bed, use some soap to scrub off anything that could give you itchiness or bumps. Give your hair a quick clean with some shampoo. You may even find this relaxing time helps clear your mind of the stresses of the day.

You should also keep your hands clean with soap and water, and when that's not possible, with hand sanitizer. Disinfect high-touch surface areas of your hotel room and wipe down your luggage, but never put it on your bed. Use a luggage rack instead.

Fight the flu with this common household appliance

You've already gotten your flu shot and are vigilantly washing your hands to guard against getting or spreading this virus. Experts say there's another line of defense you can add to your top-of-the-line flu protection protocol. It's a humidifier.

These gadgets raise moisture levels in the air by releasing water vapor or steam. This increased humidity won't kill flu particles, but it can make them heavier so they fall out of the air faster. That means even if you're in the room with someone breathing out loads of these particles, fewer may be lingering in the air for you to breathe. The ideal humidity level for shutting down the flu is between 40% and 60%.

Keep your humidifier clean or you could risk creating the flu-like symptoms you're trying to avoid. Use distilled or demineralized water rather than tap, change the water daily, and clean your humidifier with hydrogen peroxide every three days.