

Why you should feed both a cold and a fever

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Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Respiratory viruses like rhinovirus (the cause of the common cold), flu and SARS-CoV-2 make the rounds during the winter season, and many people claim to have a remedy to help illness pass quicker. But how much merit do these cures have? An expert with Baylor College of Medicine explains why the coldest time of the year brings sickness and

how to prevent and power through some seasonal illnesses.

"These seasonal viruses are easily transmitted from human to human as the [cold weather](#) brings people closer together indoors and kids are in school," said Dr. Pedro Piedra, professor of molecular virology and microbiology and of pediatrics at Baylor College of Medicine. "Colder temperatures also allow for viruses to survive on surfaces longer, and the humidity we experience here in Houston also contributes to these viruses being able to survive outside of a host."

Although the adage encourages you to "feed a cold, starve a fever," Piedra says people should be trying to get an adequate caloric intake for any illness. Fever, like excess mucus production, is one of many defense mechanisms your body relies on when it is threatened. These mechanisms require energy, which you gain by eating a well-balanced diet. Sick-friendly meals like soup often contain the appropriate elements of diet, which is why they are commonly recommended to make you feel better overall. Malaise caused by illness may lessen your appetite, but try to maintain your [eating habits](#) while you are sick.

In addition to caloric intake, adequate hydration is also important to helping your body get over a virus. People will often turn to warm tea to soothe [sore throats](#); this also will help keep you hydrated. Those experiencing excessive mucus production that settles in the back of the throat can also benefit from a salt-water gargle as this helps remove blockages and temporarily eases any irritation.

"There is also a saying that if your hair is wet and you are in a [cold environment](#), you will get sick. That is partly true," said Piedra. "You won't contract a virus, but you may weaken your immune system, which might invite sickness."

Time may be the best medicine for letting viruses pass, but [preventative](#)

measures are the best defense against respiratory viruses during the colder seasons. For people 6 months of age and older, flu and COVID vaccines are available. Also, for the first time, an RSV vaccine is available for people 60 years old and older and pregnant women at 32 to 36 weeks gestational age. For infants up to 8 months old, a long-acting monoclonal antibody is available to prevent severe RSV infection. Masking and proper hand-washing hygiene also are key to disease prevention.

"Antiviral drugs can be prescribed by your physician and are available to ease symptoms of various viruses, like influenza and SARS-CoV-2, but they need to be taken early on in the infection to make sure they are effective," said Piedra. "If your cold, flu or COVID infection advances and you begin having difficulty breathing, or if you move around and you don't feel well, reach out to your physician as this may be a sign that your condition is worsening."

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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