

GERM WARFARE

This winter follow the advice of moms who've got cold and flu fighting in the bag.

By Barbara Brody

1

Women who rarely get sick stock their purses with more than gum and ponytail holders. Try toting:

1 A lightweight wrap

You may be more susceptible to some germs when you're cold. A simple scarf keeps you cozy when it's chilly.

2 A water bottle

Staying hydrated helps the immune system function properly. It also keeps the mucus membranes in your nose moist and sticky to trap bacteria and viruses.

3 Hand sanitizer

A must for killing germs on the go. Use a product that's at least 60% alcohol.

4 A healthy snack

Good nutrition helps your body battle invaders. Apples are loaded with quercetin, an antioxidant that may help the immune system when your body is stressed.



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“WHEN WOMEN LIVE WITH CHILDREN, THE NUMBER OF COLDS AND OTHER VIRUSES THEY GET INCREASES SIGNIFICANTLY,”

says Charles P. Gerba, PhD, a microbiologist and environmental scientist at the University of Arizona. However, at some point during cold and flu season, a realization will hit you: All moms are not created equal. While most of us will spend weeks feeling lousy, others will stay perfectly healthy. We grilled seven of these women to find out how they manage to safeguard themselves against the germ masses—including their own offspring. Steal their secrets.

RALLIE MCALLISTER, MD

53, family physician, co-author of *The Mommy MD Guide to Losing Weight and Feeling Great*, and mom to 18-, 19- and 32-year-olds
Lexington, KY

HOW I STAY HEALTHY “Every morning I drink a health shake. That way if my day gets crazy, at least I know it was off to a nutritious start. I’ll combine whatever fruits and vegetables I have—blueberries and apples are my favorite—with a liquid multivitamin,



some omega-3 oil, a probiotic supplement and extra vitamin D. I’ll often add some protein powder and cinnamon because it has antibacterial properties and helps stabilize your

blood sugar. When my family gets sick, I protect myself: If my husband has a cold, I change the pillowcases every night. Before handling a sick person’s laundry, I spray the pile with Lysol, wait a few minutes before tossing it into the washer, and wash my hands when I’m done.”

IRENE AYALA

47, home service professional for Molly Maid and mom to kids ages 15, 19 and 22
Waukegan, IL

HOW I STAY HEALTHY “A flu shot is a must, as is frequent hand washing. I also like to keep my fingernails short; otherwise it’s too easy for dirt to hide under there. If you have long nails, I recommend using a scrub brush to clean them well. It’s also really



important to keep germ spots around the house clean. I always pay special attention to faucet handles, doorknobs, telephones and computer keyboards; spritz a little disinfectant spray on some Q-tips so you can get in between the keys. While they may not look dirty, these high-touch areas are almost always covered in germs.”

SUSAN TIRCH

41, pharmacist, marathoner, blogger (momswimbikerun.blogspot.com) and mom to kids ages 8, 10 and 12
Pittsburgh, PA

HOW I STAY HEALTHY “I lead a fit lifestyle, so when I come into contact with germs my body is strong enough to fight them off. About five years ago I became really active; before then, I often felt run-down and got sick more often. Now I exercise at least an hour a day, five days a week. When I’m not training for an event, I love to do CrossFit. I actually have

more energy on the days I work out. When I do get sick, my go-to remedy is zinc. It can shorten the length and severity of a cold if you start taking it within the first 24 hours.”



LAUREL AXEN CARROLL

41, acupuncturist and mom to kids ages 7 and 9
Brooklyn, NY

HOW I STAY HEALTHY “I’m

really careful about hygiene. I take my shoes off as soon as I come into the house and change my pants before coming near my bed. When I do get sick, which is rarely, I follow a classic Chinese remedy: Chop up some fresh ginger, boil it in water and drink the ‘tea.’ I down several cups right before bed, and it makes me sweat a little. If I act fast enough, I’ll feel better the next morning. I also like to add honey to my tea; it has antibacterial, antiviral and antifungal properties.”



KIM LEADER

42, flight attendant, spokesperson for the Association of Flight Attendants and mom to kids ages 1 and 3
Crown Point, IN

HOW I STAY HEALTHY “My schedule is erratic, but I’m really into sleep. I don’t hesitate to nap on the weekends if I’m exhausted—my husband can handle the

kids for a few hours, or vice versa if he needs the rest. My top tip for traveling is to avoid putting anything in the seat-back pockets:

People put so much dirty stuff in there, from food to tissues to diapers, and it’s impossible to clean them thoroughly between flights. If I really want to stash my phone or Kindle in the pocket, I’ll first slip it into a ziplock bag or a clean air-sickness bag.”



JULIE TAPPER

38, school social worker and mom to kids ages 3 and 6
Peabody, MA

HOW I STAY HEALTHY

“Whenever one of my kids gets a stomach bug, I throw anything that’s been contaminated—bedding, towels, stuffed animals—into the wash. I also regularly disinfect toys by putting them in the sink, spraying them with a bleach-based bathroom cleaner and then filling the sink with hot water. I let the toys sit there for a few minutes before rinsing each one. At work, I insist that students—even kindergartners—throw their own tissues in the trash.”



DIANE FERNANDEZ

38, second-grade teacher and mom to kids ages 4, 7, 10 and 11
Gainesville, VA

HOW I STAY HEALTHY

“I’m serious about hand washing, at home and work. If I see a kid picking his nose or something, I’ll immediately send him to lather up. If someone comes out of the bathroom too quickly, I tell her to go back and wash her

hands. I wipe down desks and the communal reading table with Clorox disinfecting wipes.

At home I use Windex vinegar multi-surface cleaner.”
(continued on page 98)

STOP THE SPREAD, STAT!

The school nurse just called you to pick up your child early, which means it's only a matter of time before everyone under your roof gets sick as well. But it is possible to stop illness from taking down the whole family one by one! Charles P. Gerba, PhD, a microbiologist and environmental scientist at the University of Arizona, offers these suggestions.

1 Spray and wait. It's smart to clean refrigerator handles, doorknobs and faucets often. But many people spritz on a disinfectant solution and immediately wipe it off—which doesn't give it time to work, says Gerba. Instead, let the solution sit on surfaces for 3 to 5 minutes and allow to air-dry. Try Clorox 4 in One Disinfecting Spray (walmart.com, \$5).

2 Use hand sanitizer at home. Slathering on sanitizer even once a day, in addition to frequent hand washing, can improve your chances of stopping the spread of illness throughout the household. Leave a dispenser on the nightstand of the ill family member and encourage him or her to use it. Choose a product that's at least 60% alcohol, such as Purell Advanced Hand Sanitizer Refreshing Gel (walmart.com, \$3).

3 Switch up your towels. Gerba's research has shown that household towels contain traces of e. coli bacteria after just one day of use. Improper hand washing might be to blame, as well as leaving the toilet seat up when flushing (droplets can fly through the air). Swap out cloth towels every day or two, and when someone is sick consider putting out paper towels instead. Try Kleenex Hand Towels (target.com, \$3).

4 Ditch the bar soap. Yes, germs really can live on it. Opt for liquid; a no-touch dispenser like Umbra's Otto (amazon.com, \$30) or Simplehuman's Bath Sensor Pump (bedbathandbeyond.com, \$50) is your cleanest option.

