

Exercising During Cold and Flu Season

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When You Should Be Exercising During Cold and Flu Season

As a change of season approaches, so too does the dreaded cold and flu season that can quickly take many enthusiastic exercisers off course. Runny noses, sniffles and coughs can derail your exercise and fitness regimen, just when your new year's resolution is beginning to waver. With many opting out of physical activity after the slightest cough or sneeze, knowing when it's ok to be physically active and when it's not during the change of season can be integral to achieving your goals faster.

New York physician Dr. Lewis G Maharam believes the motto for exercising when you're feeling unwell is always: "If you can do it, do it. If you can't, don't."

The author of *Running Doc's Guide to Healthy Running* shares his five tips for being mindful of when to work out this season:

1. If you experience symptoms above the neck, like a runny nose or head cold, then exercising is ok. In fact, feeding a cold with some moderate exercise, like a brisk walk, may be helpful, Dr. Maharam says. Research confirms that regular, moderate aerobic exercise can strengthen your immune system. Those who exercise five days or more a week are much less likely to succumb to a cold or flu than their inactive peers.
2. If you are running a fever, it's probably better to give

the workout or run a skip. As Dr. Maharam explains, during exercise, our metabolism increases due to a rise in body heat. If you start with an elevated body temperature, then your body will be unable to bring its internal heat back to equilibrium. "If fever gets too high, you break down proteins, maybe in the kidneys or liver," he adds. If you have a flu or virus with fever and pain, then the best remedy for your ailment is plenty of bed rest.

3. If you're sick, don't go to the gym. Common cold and flu viruses can stay on equipment – like treadmills, weights and handles – for many hours after they've come into contact. In a place where a lot of people are sweating simultaneously, touching your nose or mouth during a workout is common and with unwashed hands, this is a direct route for viruses. When you're sick, consider exercising privately – at home or away from lots of people. If you're worried about getting sick at the gym, always carry a towel and perhaps some hand-disinfectant.
4. Take a few days break between workouts. While lots of exercise can help to strengthen the body's immunity, elite athletes have been shown to experience an increase in stress hormones and a subsequent dip in immunity after more than one and a half hours of physical activity. "During that time, the athletes are more susceptible to colds, flu, and, most commonly, the so-called "marathon sniffles," Dr. Maharam points out. While symptoms can usually subside 48 hours later, "At the end of a race, when you're all sweaty and they're all sweaty, you don't need to be hugging and kissing people," Maharam said. "Your immune system isn't as strong as it was."
5. Never force your furry-friend and running mate to exercise when they're sick. Studies show that when animals aren't feeling well and forced to exercise

through fever and pain, their flu or virus symptoms can be further exacerbated. This can result in prolonged and even life-threatening illness. So when your pet is unwell, perhaps it's a good time to go for a run or walk solo, or call a friend.