

Stay under cover!
Being chilly slows
blood flow, making it
harder for infection-
fighting white blood
cells to circulate.

Your sick day survival guide

When you wake up feeling crappy, don't freak out. Instead, follow this (almost) hour-by-hour plan to sleep, eat and treat your way back to health. That's better already, right? By Andrea Bartz

Morning ▶

7 A.M.

CALL IT Consider cashing in a sick day if you feel achy or chilled, if you're hacking up a storm or if you have a fever above 101 degrees; these symptoms mean you're probably contagious, says SELF's on-call medical expert, Henry S. Lodge, M.D. Your body needs rest to keep its immune system in peak form, so leave the message, then turn off your alarm.

9:30 A.M.

EAT UP Forget the "starve a cold" adage. Battling a cold or flu, your body needs energy. Have a probiotic-rich meal to fill your gut with healthy bacteria, important for keeping your immune system ticking, says Milton Stokes, R.D., of Stamford, Connecticut. Top yogurt with honey, which may ease coughs, and berries; the antioxidants in them are immune ammunition.

10:30 A.M.

HYDRATE You can't flush out a virus, but staying hydrated is critical, says Jackie Eghrari-Sabet, M.D., an American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology fellow. Refill your water bottle often, or pick a warm drink such as tea to soothe a scratchy throat. Downing two quarts of total fluids (8 ounces times 8) is a good goal, Dr. Lodge says.

12 P.M.

SLURP SOUP Believe those cheesy commercials: Chicken soup really can help you feel better, research suggests. The warm broth eases sore throats, carrots are high in immune-enhancing beta-carotene, and onions and garlic have antibacterial properties. No appetite? Sip broth or a sport drink for hydration and calories.

Afternoon ▶

2 P.M.

TRY YOUR FAVE FIX Studies on the benefits of OJ-and-Sprite spritzers may be lacking, but if they were your mom's secret weapon when you were a kid, go for it! When people popped echinacea or a placebo, those who believed the remedy would ease their colds got over the bug two and half days sooner than did those who took nothing, research shows.

5 P.M.

WORK IT OUT If your symptoms are above the neck, a gentle workout, such as an easy session on the elliptical, may help, says Jeffrey Woods, Ph.D., a kinesthesiologist at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign. But *gentle* is the operative word: Go too hard and your cold-clearing prowess diminishes. Have chest congestion, fever or aches? Skip the gym.

7 P.M.

SPICE UP DINNER Foods with a kick make you feel less congested, says Bruce Barrett, M.D., an associate professor of family medicine at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. Try a stir-fry: Lightly sauté diced garlic (burning it squelches antimicrobial properties, Stokes says); toss in veggies and your protein of choice. Add as much Sriracha sauce as you like!

10 P.M.

HIT THE SACK Forget Conan: You need at least seven to eight hours of sleep right now. If you wake up again with a fever or raging sore throat, see your doc to rule out an illness that needs an Rx. Then avoid stressing about another missed workday with a chick-flick fest. Our pick: *Crazy, Stupid, Love*. Quality time with Ryan Gosling might be the best medicine.

FAST-TRACK RELIEF

Medicine-cabinet confusion, begone!

IF YOU'RE COUGHING

Look for meds containing dextromethorphan and guaifenesin, to help reduce coughing and thin mucus.

IF YOU'RE STUFFY

Take a decongestant with pseudoephedrine (e.g., Sudafed). The drug may make it hard to sleep; before bed, switch to an antihistamine with diphenhydramine (e.g., Benadryl), which will help you breathe *and* slumber.

IF YOU'RE IN PAIN For head or body aches, try acetaminophen (Tylenol) or an anti-inflammatory, like naproxen (Aleve), ibuprofen (Advil) or aspirin. Effectiveness varies from person to person, so see what works for you.

IF YOUR THROAT KILLS

Head to the kitchen. Mix half a teaspoon of salt in a cup of warm water; gargle. The brine draws moisture from swollen tissue.