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**MONICA
REINAGEL:**

Hi there. This is Monica Reinagel, the Nutrition Diva, here with your quick and dirty tips for eating well and feeling fabulous. Cold and flu season is upon us, and I have a mission. I want to keep Nutrition Diva listeners healthier this year.

There's a lot of urban legends out there about what you can do to prevent colds. So I'm going to devote the next two shows to sorting out fact from fiction and showing you the most effective things you can do to prevent colds. Today's quick and dirty tip is that vitamin C can actually help protect you, but you need to take it on an ongoing basis. On the other hand, the popular immune booster echinacea works best if you don't take it every day.

Singers have a pathological fear of the common cold. I mean, for most people, a scratchy throat or hoarse voice, well, it's uncomfortable and it's inconvenient. But for us, it can be a major career disaster. I've never known a singer who didn't have an elaborate protocol for warding off colds.

Turn a singer upside down in November, and some combination of zinc lozenges, echinacea capsules, vitamin C packets, and saline nasal spray is sure to fall out of her pockets. But do any of these things actually reduce your risk of getting sick? Well, over the last 10 years, a lot of researchers have been trying to figure out what works and what doesn't.

If you'd like to review the research yourself, I'll include some links in my show notes. Believe it or not, we still don't have definitive answers on a lot of this stuff. But here's what we do know. Of all the nutrients that are rumored to prevent colds, vitamin C is by far the most studied. And it also seems to have the most convincing evidence.

Taking 500 milligrams or more of vitamin C a day throughout the cold season probably will reduce your chances of getting a cold this year. It seems to work extra well for people who engage in strenuous activity or who spend time out in very cold temperatures. So if you're planning to run the Iditarod this year, start loading up on vitamin C.

Of course, some people in these studies got colds even though they took vitamin C. But their colds tended to be shorter and their symptoms less severe than people who didn't take any vitamin C. And this was especially true for young kids.

By the way, waiting until you get sick to start taking vitamin C isn't nearly as effective as taking it all along. Your body can't store up a lot of extra vitamin C. So your best bet is to get regular doses throughout the day.

Here's an idea. In addition to taking a vitamin C supplement once or twice a day, try to eat some vitamin C-rich foods at every meal and snack throughout the day as well. Of course, there are citrus fruits. But here are some foods I bet you didn't know were high in vitamin C-- broccoli, potatoes, kale, and chili peppers. To find more foods high in vitamin C, you can use the nutrient search tool on nutritiondata.com.

Now echinacea is a popular herbal supplement that many people take on a daily basis because they've heard that it boosts the immune system. And echinacea does rev up your immune response. But it's not really a good idea to take it for longer than a few weeks at a time. For one thing, it seems to lose its effectiveness with extended use. And there's also some concern that long-term use of echinacea can suppress other aspects of immune function.

So unlike vitamin C, which works best if you take it every day, you're better off saving your echinacea for when you really need it. Use echinacea to bolster your defenses during times when you're particularly vulnerable to infection. And that would be times of unusual stress, periods when colds are going around your family or your workplace, or any time that you're going to be in close contact with a lot of new people, such as when you're traveling or visiting family. But after six or eight weeks at most, you'll want to take a couple of weeks off.

Zinc lozenges have become quite popular as a way to treat colds. There's no doubt that zinc is very important to a healthy immune system. But the evidence for zinc as a cold remedy-- it's pretty mixed. Some studies have found that zinc lozenges make colds shorter and less severe. But an equal number found no benefit whatsoever.

When researchers pooled all the evidence from the studies into a single analysis, they still found only weak support for zinc lozenges as a way to treat the common cold. So it's your call. Using zinc lozenges as directed will put you well above the recommended maximum intake for this nutrient.

Now you're not going to get into trouble by using zinc lozenges for a few days when you have a cold. But over time, too much zinc will cause problems. So if you want to use them, use them

only for a few days at a time.

I'm running out of time for today's show. So tune in next week for three more tips on how to get fewer colds this year. Visit nutritiondiva.quickanddirtytips.com for a transcript of this episode and links to things I mentioned in today's show. Also, sign up for my new weekly newsletter and get more tips, recipes, and answers to your nutrition questions.

If you have a question for me, send an email to nutrition@quickanddirtytips.com or leave me a voicemail at 206-203-1438. And then be sure to watch both the newsletter and the podcast for your answer. This is Monica Reinagel, the Nutrition Diva, with your quick and dirty tips for eating well and feeling fabulous. Remember, these tips are not intended as medical advice because everyone is different. So please work with your health professional to determine what's right for you.

That's all for today. Have a great week. And remember to eat something good for me.

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