

Outdoors health tips from the Posse: Change of season illness

I spent much of my early years being raised by my grandparents. This afforded a lifestyle of fewer rules, and allowed me to pursue my endless outdoor activities, without parental interruptions for nonsense such as “bedtime, homework and chores.”



Mark Rackay
Tips from the Posse

While I was still incarcerated in the public holding cell, known as school, I did experience a freedom many other kids did not enjoy. I also lived with people who were two generations behind me, and that allowed me to learn some of the old country ways.

One thing I remember specifically was my grandfather got sickly at the beginning of spring and fall. Family referred to it as “change of season sickness.” He would develop all the symptoms of a cold with an upset stomach thrown in for good measure.

After I moved to Colorado, in my early teens, I found myself getting sick at the start of spring and fall, with similar symptoms as my grandfather. I assumed it was just one of those life bombs thrown at you that you must endure and paid it no never mind.

If you also have the same problem with seasonal sickness, you are not alone. Research has found that rhinoviruses and coronoaviruses are most prevalent and replicate easiest when the weather is cool. These are the two agents necessary for the common cold.

The cold air does not make you sick, it is the virus itself. Influenza replicates and spreads best when the temperatures are cold and the air is dry, which is why the flu is around during the winter months.

Seasonal allergies are also at their peak in the spring and fall. My wife spends the entire spring sneezing, coughing, and rubbing her swollen eyes. These allergy bursts can last for months, whereas a cold is usually gone in a couple weeks.

The term "hay fever" comes from the time when farmers would be col-

lecting their hay from the fields at the end of summer. Many farmers would become sick with cold symptoms and a fever. While they thought it was a virus, they were actually suffering from exposure to the allergens from the fields.

According to the American College of Allergy, asthma and immunology, seasonal allergies can increase a person's vulnerability to viral infections. The nasal inflammation caused by seasonal allergies makes it easier for viruses to "set up shop" in your nose. While your immune system is busy dealing with your allergies, it has no resources left to fight off the illness causing viruses that make entry into the system.

I am a lucky person, in that allergies have pretty much left me alone. Even without allergies, the huge changes in barometric pressures during the spring and fall, along with the temperature swings and wind, can irritate the daylight's out of your nasal passages and lungs. These effects from the seasonal weather can compromise your immune system and leave you more susceptible to colds and flu.

A study at Yale University found that the common cold thrives in cooler temperatures. As little as a 7-degree drop in ambient temperature can mess with your body's ability to stop cold viruses from proliferating.

When your body is exposed to an infection, your immune system releases interferons to help block the virus. A drop in temperature decreases the body's immune response and that allows the viruses to replicate quickly and easily.

If you are one of the seasonal sufferers, there is some hope for prevention of the sickness. Some evidence suggests that keeping your nose area warm can keep your immune defenses elevated. On those cool or windy spring and fall days, wear a scarf around your face.

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle really helps. That includes regular exercise and eating healthy. Get a good cardio workout at least three times a week. Cardio exercise boosts your immune system all year long, not just during seasonal changes.

You also need to keep up on your sleep. A good six to eight hours of



When the snow begins to appear in the high country, signaling a change of season, many people become ill. (Special to the Montrose Daily Press/Mark Rackay)

restorative sleep, every night, is necessary. This works best for me if I stay on a scheduled bedtime and up at the same time each day.

There is some evidence that vitamin D supplements may help ward off colds and flu. I prefer to get my vitamin D from the sun by being outdoors, but that can be difficult when the weather is against you.

The best defense for keeping these viruses and bacteria away from you is proper hand washing. Wash your hands frequently, with soap and water, especially before eating. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth because that is how those germs enter your body.

Change of season sickness is one of the things I inherited from my grandfather that I could have done without. I sure won't add it to the codicils for my kids. Taking steps to prevent it has gotten easier as I get older. I used to fight bedtime, but lately, I welcome it. ●

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press and an avid hunter who travels all across North America in search of adventure, and serves as a director and public information officer for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the Posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org.



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