



WITH DR CRIS BEER

# ARE YOU READY FOR FLU SEASON?

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Here's how to prepare and protect yourself from the dreaded lurgy

**F**lu season is just around the corner and it tends to hit those who are unhealthy the hardest, so it's time to get your body fighting fit. Each year the flu costs us dearly: an estimated 1.5 million work days are lost and the related cost to our healthcare system is about \$85 million dollars.

Considering all this, it's key that we prepare ourselves for

this nasty infection to hopefully lessen its impact. The flu tends to cause significant illness in individuals who are:

- **Very young or old**
- **Very overweight or have a poor diet**
- **Smokers, asthmatics or suffering from another chronic lung disease**
- **Depressed or chronically stressed**

- **Low in vitamin D or lacking in sleep**
- **Taking medications such as steroids and chemotherapy**

Those not considered high risk can still contract the flu but often have less severe symptoms.

Keep in mind that the flu, which is caused by the influenza virus, isn't the same as the common head cold, which can be caused by a number

of different respiratory viruses. The flu is characterised by high fevers, body aches, and fatigue, with or without a runny nose or cough. It can also sometimes cause abdominal pain, nausea, diarrhoea and vomiting, especially in children. It typically lasts for one week, though the fatigue can linger for up to one month.

If you do contract the flu, remember to rest, stay hydrated and take paracetamol if needed. To avoid transmission, practise good hygiene such as proper handwashing, disposing of tissues and not sharing drinks, toothbrushes or cutlery.

An annual flu immunisation can largely protect you from influenza viruses but may not cover you for all strains as some can "slip through the cracks", so you may still contract the flu but with less severe symptoms. The flu injection is free for people aged 65 and older and for those with certain medical conditions, so ask your GP if you're eligible.

It's impossible to contract the actual flu from the immunisation but you can experience flu-like symptoms for up to 48 hours after the injection.



The best defence you can have towards the flu is to follow these simple tips:

- **Reduce your stress levels as stress can suppress immunity.**
- **Get enough sleep consistently leading up to winter.**
- **Eat a diet rich in fresh fruit and vegetables that contain essential immune-boosting vitamins such as A, C, E, B6, B12, and folate.**
  - **Quit smoking.**
- **Get enough sunshine daily to boost your vitamin D levels.**
- **Improve your lung health by managing your asthma well.**
  - **Maintain a healthy body weight for your frame.**