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Health Care

Beat the cold and flu season with tips for healthy immunity

Increasing your intake of nutrients, reducing the amount of sugar in your diet and washing your hands frequently will keep sniffles away

Winter is now upon us. The change of seasons is a very common time for us to get sick with a cold or the flu. Many of us opt for the flu shot for infection prevention, but why not work on strengthening your immune system instead? Unlike the flu shot, helping your immune system to function optimally is not associated with any side effects and you actually will reap the rewards for years to come. Consider these 10 tips to remain sniffle-free!

1. Increase your intake of the nutrients that are essential for a healthy immune system. These include vitamin C, vitamin A (not for women who are pregnant or trying to conceive), zinc, selenium and a mixed tocopherol vitamin E. These are great to maintain a healthy immune system and they are also potent antioxidants. Vitamins and minerals are best taken with food.

2. Decrease intake or eliminate sugar from your diet. Eating sugar decreases your white blood cell count for six hours after consumption. White blood cells are responsible for attacking invading infection-causing bacteria and viruses. Imagine if you tend to snack on jelly beans or licorice throughout the day—your immune system is chronically lowered! This also means juice is not the best choice during a cold or the flu because it contains a lot of sugar. Dilute your juices or choose pure water instead.

3. Ensure adequate protein intake. Protein is necessary for the formation of antibodies for fighting infection as well as tissue healing and repair. Great sources of protein include omega-3 eggs, chicken, fish, tofu, beans, seeds, nuts and protein powders like whey or soy. Whey protein powder has been found to have great effects on the

immune system.

4. Monitor your stress. Stress causes an increase in the stress hormone cortisol, high levels of which inhibit healthy immune system function. This is why many of us tend to get sick after school exams or once we leave for a vacation. Manage stress with exercise, yoga, meditation or calming herbs like rhodiola, relover or ashwagandha. Do not overdo cardiovascular exercise. Too much running or intense, heavy weight training can deplete your immune system as well. Along with managing your stress hormones, you must keep your blood sugars balanced. Remember that skipping a meal causes physical stress on your body. Be sure to eat at least every three to four hours and consume protein, low glycemic carbohydrates and healthy fats like avocados, olive oil and organic canola oil.

5. Wash your hands frequently. At this time of year there are lots of germs around on the subway, at the

gym or at school. The simplest thing you can do to prevent a cold is to keep your hands clean and away from your face.

6. Include the following immune-boosting foods in your diet: garlic, onions, blueberries, broccoli, spinach, mushrooms (shitake, reishi, etc.) and red and yellow fruits and

by the use of antibiotics, the birth control pill or excess sugar and carbohydrate intake. Be sure to follow any course of antibiotics with supplements of acidophilus for double the length of time you took the antibiotics.

9. If you find you are doing all of these things and still experience frequent colds or the flu, take immune-supporting herbs that are safe for long-term use (like the whole of the winter months). These include astragalus, usnea and/or ligusticum. Echinacea is commonly used during cold season as well. If you find that everyone in the office is sick, take it daily for prevention. Echinacea is best cycled a few weeks at a time or taken in higher dosages just during an acute infection.

10. Take plant sterols. These are one of my favourite products. Plant sterols modulate your immune system. If aspects are running too high (as in autoimmune diseases or allergies) they help to bring it down. Or, if they are running too low (like with frequent colds or the flu) sterols help to increase your immune system function. They also decrease cortisol levels, essential for keeping your immune system strong. I usually recommend taking these on an empty stomach, such as upon rising and before bed. You may combine them with your acidophilus supplements.

Bonus: Try this homeopathic flu prevention protocol for the whole family:

Influenzinum 9 CH: take one dose on Mondays

Thymuline 9 CH: take one dose on Wednesdays

Do this for five weeks to prevent the flu.

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