

[IMAGE]

Winter Cold and Flu Defense

By Dr. Jared M. Skowron

If you're looking to gear up for the cold and flu season without subjecting yourself or your family to the potential dangers of the flu vaccine, take heart: There are natural ways to boost your immune system and reduce your risk of getting sick. Here are a few to discuss with your doctor.

Swine flu was a bust. The hype, the worldwide craze, the unnecessary vaccine, all fizzled out. Fewer people died of the swine flu in the 2009-2010 season than an average flu season. (Of course, that's not to diminish the fact that some people did in fact die.) But let's turn our eyes to the present, for the flu is back this winter season. We don't yet know how many people will be affected; perhaps it will be an average one, perhaps a true pandemic. No one knows for sure, but we must do everything to prepare our families, boost our immune systems, and have effective, natural treatments at the ready.

immune system - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark The influenza virus starts in November, but doesn't peak in activity until February and usually winds down in March. Approximately 5-20 percent of our population gets the flu, many mild, some so severe that they need to be hospitalized. On average, 36,000 people die from the flu in our country, the majority of them being the elderly; the death toll is 250,000 to 500,000 worldwide.

We are all familiar with the standard flu symptoms of fever, headache, fatigue, cough, sore throat, rhinitis (stuffy nose) and myalgia (muscle pain). Children can also experience nausea, vomiting, otitis media (ear infection), and diarrhea. The illness lasts up to a week, with cough and malaise lasting up to two weeks. Younger children (6-20 percent) can experience febrile seizures concurrently.

As stated, the best way to protect yourself and your loved ones is to boost your immune system and reduce your chances of complications if you do contract the flu or even a stubborn cold. Preventing and treating the flu is very effectively done using natural medicines, including vitamins, minerals, botanicals, and homeopathics. A combination of some or all will boost your immune systems for the entire winter season.

Vitamin C

A study of 715 people showed that flu symptoms were decreased by 85 percent when people took 6 grams of vitamin C as a one-time loading dose, then continuing with 1 gram three times a day, compared with people taking only the 3 grams daily. The message here is to take a lot of vitamin C the first day you feel symptoms or the first day people around you are getting sick, and then take 3 grams daily after that. Keep in mind that vitamin C can loosen stools, so be careful if you are predisposed to this.

An additional study showed that vitamin C is 10 times more effective in its antiviral properties when taken with iron. Ten to 20 mg of iron can be taken on a daily basis, and is also a good mineral to balance the stool-loosening effects of vitamin C.

Vitamin D

Vitamin D has exploded in research and popularity the past few years. Most of us are familiar with its bone-building properties, however new research suggests it improves the immune system as well. Have your doctor test your vitamin D levels before supplementing. Research suggests 2,000 IU daily is safe for most adults and children. Higher doses are safe and effective, but must be monitored by your doctor.

Elderberry

Elderberry (*Sambucus*) was researched in a group of 60 people and found to alleviate symptoms four days earlier compared with controls. Elderberry helps boost the immune system and is great-tasting for kids. Start taking as soon as symptoms manifest.

Ginseng

Panax quinquefolium (ginseng) was studied in a large group of 323 patients as a preventive natural medicine. The group that took panax experienced 30 percent less colds compared with the placebo group (people who didn't take ginseng), and average number of sick days were 11 compared with 16 in the non-treatment group.

Oscillococcinum

Last, but not least, the well-known oscillococcinum is a homeopathic flu treatment that is created new every year. Tough to pronounce, but effective; a Cochrane review of all oscillococcinum studies showed that it reduces the length of illness compared with placebo.

There's a high likelihood that the flu and/or colds will affect your family every year. In most cases it's nothing more than an inconvenience, in some cases it can be deadly serious. Prevention and immune boosting is essential for everyone to ensure that when they do get sick, it is only a short and mild inconvenience. Trust in the power of natural medicine. Talk to your doctor for more information about these and other natural ways to boost your immune system and ward off colds and the flu.

vaccine - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark **The Flu Vaccine: A Few Words of Caution**

Flu vaccines are available on an annual basis, but concern should be taken for the following reasons:

- Flu vaccines contain thimerisol, a neurotoxic mercury preservative.
 - Children with severe egg allergy should not get the vaccine.
 - Children with Guillain-Barre syndrome should not get the vaccine.
 - Young infants with low immune systems should not get the vaccine.
 - Children with acute illness should not get the vaccine.
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4 Healthy Habits

washing hands - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark Besides considering the natural immune boosters discussed in this article, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers these common-sense tips for preventing cold/flu transmission. Yes, you've heard them before, but are you and your family practicing them or ignoring them - and paying the price?

Keep Your Distance. Avoid close contact with people who are sick, and when you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick. If you can, spend plenty of time in bed resting. A day off from work may save you (and the co-workers you could infect) substantially more time and inconvenience.

Cover Up. This seems easy, but how many people don't do it? Always cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. If you feel a cough/sneeze coming on and do not have a tissue handy, cover your mouth/nose completely with your hands and then wash your hands immediately. If your hands aren't available, sneeze/cough into your sleeve; anything except the air, where your germs can be inhaled by those around you.

Stay Clean. Wash your hands frequently to minimize the chances that something (or someone) you've touched will get you sick. If soap and water aren't readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, which is easy to carry with you in a purse, backpack, etc., when you're on the road. Again, sounds easy, but considering how many people don't wash their hands even after visiting the bathroom, we thought it deserved repeating.

Hands Off. Germs are often spread by touching something that is contaminated with germs and then touching the eyes, nose or mouth. If you're a "hands-on" type of person, keep in mind that you need to wash your hands frequently (particularly when in public places) or eventually, someone else's germs will become yours.

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