

[IMAGE]

Boost Your Immune System

By Julie T. Chen, MD

I know most of us think that we only have to worry about our immune system during the winter months but a healthy immune system throughout the rest of the year is actually important in helping us ward off infections during the winter months. In fact, we should be boosting our immune system all year round. So, how can we do it in a natural way?

A strong healthy diet foundation is essential for immune support. Many of my patients in my clinic of integrative medicine in San Jose CA think that as long as they have one vegetable or fruit a day, they are fine. But I highly recommend patients to eat vegetables at every meal and they should be eating a variety of colors of vegetables. In doing so, patients can ensure that they are getting all the vitamins and minerals they need for a healthy immune system.

When it comes down to it, our immune cells need both vitamins and minerals and if you don't want to have to figure out all the minutiae of which to take, you should just get into the easy habit of eating a rainbow colored diet of vegetables, beans, nuts, healthy fats, and whole grain starches. If you eat a balanced diet at every meal, you'll ensure that your immune soldiers are well fed hence able to help you combat colds.

vegetables - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Another factor that is important for immune function is sleep. Sleep is when our body heals and repairs. Oftentimes, when people are lacking sleep or under a lot of stress, that is usually the time when you would catch a cold. So, make sure to put aside time for sleep and relaxation. In doing so, again, your immune function will be better equipped to help you ward off infections.

Finally, exercise is important in keeping your body efficient in protecting itself from outside sources of harm...like infections. Mild to moderate exercise about 3-5 days per week should help keep your body's immune system healthy. Extreme exercise can suppress immune function so if you are someone who likes to do extreme marathon training or sports activities, make sure to allow your body to heal and rest in between your training sessions so that you do not over-tax your immune system.

If unfortunately despite good healthy efforts at supporting your immune system, you are still unable to ward off a cold, you can try supplements such as black elderberry, vitamin C, vitamin D3, Echinacea, and Zinc,

just to name a few options. I highly recommend taking these only if cleared by your doctor to make sure you are not on medications or do not have any medical issues that may prevent you from safely taking these.

You should also see your doctor before starting these to evaluate the seriousness of your infection and to see if you need medications like antibiotics for it.

Finally, there is one last thing to do that will help you to avoid infections...make sure you wash your hands frequently and wipe down public areas where germs are easily spread before you touch it. Prevention is always key to the healthiest you we can achieve.

Dr. Julie T. Chen is board-certified in internal medicine and fellowship-trained and board-certified in integrative medicine. She has her own medical practice in San Jose, Calif. She is the medical director of corporation wellness at several Silicon Valley-based corporations, is on several medical expert panels of Web sites and nonprofit organizations, is a recurring monthly columnist for several national magazines, and has been featured in radio, newspaper, and magazine interviews. She incorporates various healing modalities into her practice including, but is not limited to, medical acupuncture, Chinese scalp acupuncture, clinical hypnotherapy, strain-counterstrain osteopathic manipulations, and biofeedback. To learn more, visit www.makinghealthyez.com.

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