



Avoid the Flu by Strengthening Your Immune System

By Dr. Brent Barlow, ND

The fall and the winter months are the time of year we become most susceptible to catching colds and flu's. This increased risk is in part due to increased exposure to viruses and bacteria but is also a result of several other underlying health factors that weaken the immune system. The best way to avoid colds, flu's, and other illnesses is to strengthen your overall health so the immune system can function optimally.

The immune system is your front-line defence against anything foreign to your body. The immune system identifies, remembers, attacks, and destroys disease-causing invaders. It is the body's surveillance system, intended to protect you from disease by searching out and destroying any health-damaging agents.

While reducing your exposure to viruses and bacteria by washing your hands, covering up when you cough, and avoiding contact with your eyes, nose, and mouth is important there is a certain level of exposure that you cannot prevent. When this exposure occurs it is important for the immune system to be up to the challenge.

3 Common Stressors to the immune System

The immune system requires a steady flow of energy throughout the day in order to do its job effectively. When energy is "wasted" on other stressors the immune system simply gets fewer resources. Therefore, when you are exposed to a virus or bacteria your body cannot mount an effective defence.

If your diet contains food that your body is allergic or sensitive to the immune system will mount an attack against the food and as a result leave the body more susceptible to other exposures. There are more white blood cells in your intestines than anywhere else in your body and when they are tied up with food allergies they cannot handle the other threats. Avoid known allergens and other foods that cause digestive upset symptoms and consider food allergy testing to identify your food allergies.

Emotional stress, financial stress, and personal pressure inhibit the immune system. These forms of stress increase the amount of cortisol produced in the adrenal glands. Cortisol directly inhibits the ability of white blood cells to seek and destroy pathogens. This time of year can be emotionally stressful for many people but it is important to seek support and strengthen your stress coping mechanisms in order to prevent infections.

During the fall and winter months the body simply requires more sleep. This is in part due to the natural seasonal rhythms that humans have evolved with. As the nights get longer and the amount of sunlight diminishes the body's internal clock shifts. More sleep is also required due to the increased stressors of a colder, damper, and more stressful environment. Be kind to yourself and ensure you are getting enough sleep each night and rest throughout the day.

Naturopathic Doctors are trained to identify areas of the body that are weakened and require support. Identifying and treating the causes of a weakened immune system provides effective and efficient support for preventing and overcoming illness. Whether or not you get vaccinated for the flu you still need to address the health of your immune system in order to have optimal immunity. The natural approach to cold and flu prevention should involve a thorough assessment of your health, identifying and removing the obstacles to effective immune function, and providing the essential nutrients required by the immune system.

Naturopathic Doctors (NDs) can support the immune system with nutrition, vitamin and mineral supplementation, botanical medicine, acupuncture, homeopathy, physical medicine, hydrotherapy, injection therapies, and IV therapy. NDs can also support the body during acute infections and help reduce the severity of infections and speed the recovery process.



Dr. Brent Barlow is a naturopathic physician practicing at Okanagan Naturopathic Healthcare in Kelowna, BC. He believes strongly in identifying and treating the causes of disease rather than focusing on the treatment of symptoms. To learn more about Dr. Barlow visit his website at www.drbrentbarlownd.com or call 250-860-8855.