

Boost Your Immunity ...Naturally!

By Dr. Rida Wang, ND

It's that time of year when the rain and/or snow have worn out their welcome, the winds are wild and the mercury in the thermometer shows no sign of rising. Such an unfavourable external climate often has negative effects on our internal climate, putting stress on our immune system. Colds, influenza and upper respiratory infections are common this time of year for several reasons: as a result of a cooler climate, we tend to stay indoors more, keep windows closed, exercise less, eat fewer fresh fruits and vegetables and indulge in convenient, pre-packaged comfort foods more often, all of which contribute to lower moods, decreased energy levels and, ultimately, a weakened immune system. This season, don't let the weather shut you down. Work on staying healthy to beat a second wave of colds and influenza that may sneak up on us.

When it comes to any type of infection, including a cold or flu, prevention is the best medicine. There are plenty of ways to naturally boost immunity. The nose and mouth act as gateways for bugs to enter the upper respiratory system, and protecting these pathways is key in preventing infection. Throughout the day, brave the outdoors and take in deep breaths of fresh air. This will help to wake up the senses and, more importantly, the fresh oxygen will help clean out the lungs. Although it's chilly, try cracking open a window to let fresh air circulate in the home or workplace. The fresh breeze will help get rid of some of the germs that are hanging around. Having a humidifier in the bedroom is a good investment for upper respiratory health. During the night, mucous membranes dry out, rendering them more prone to infection. Humidifiers help alleviate dryness by keeping membranes moist.

Staying active is also necessary in warding off infection the natural way. During the winter there are plenty of indoor activities to help work your heart and lungs. Try indoor team sports such as hockey, tennis, basketball and soccer. Even

think about spin classes, yoga sessions or weightlifting at your local gym. Regular exercise and sweating are excellent ways to lift energy and mood levels, not to mention they help contribute to a trim waistline.

Paying attention to your diet also plays a major factor in immune health. Plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables supply your body with the vitamins and nutrients necessary to help stave off infection. Whenever possible, buy local produce. It will be fresh, flavourful and may contain more nutrients than imported produce. Garlic is a guaranteed immunity booster. Including fresh, raw garlic in dishes is a tasty way to naturally fight off infection. Ensuring healthy gut flora—with the help of fruits and vegetables as well as plain yogurt—has also been shown to be an important factor in immune response.

Beneficial probiotics aid in our body's ability to process nutrients, which in turn keeps our immune systems strong. Aside from a healthy gastrointestinal tract, there are several nutrients that have been known to enhance immune defense. Vitamin C has long been touted to promote immunity, but we are now realizing that zinc is useful in enhancing vitamin C absorption.

Herbal remedies are also a useful tool in the fight against infection. Oil of oregano is a potent anti-viral tincture that can be taken on its own or mixed with water and salt to either gargle or use as a nasal rinse. Other anti-microbial herbs to consider are echinacea, andrographis, astragalus, elderberry, Siberian ginseng and eucalyptus.

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