



Helping You Achieve Health . . . Naturally!

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'Tis the Season for Cold and Flu Prevention

By Jaclyn Smith, BSc, ND
Naturopathic Doctor

It's that time of the year again—cold and flu season. While some of us are preparing for the holidays, others are stuck at home with their decongestants. Chicken soup may soothe the soul, but a strong immune system will always be the best prevention. We've all heard that you can boost your immune system and reduce susceptibility by maintaining good hygiene (regular hand washing, sneezing into a tissue or your arm), healthy diet, moderate exercise, quality sleep, and by minimizing stress. However, if you feel like your immune system is not quite up to par, arm it with some scientifically proven natural remedies.

Botanical Medicine

Astragalus membranaceus

Astragalus is one of the best herbs for boosting the immune system while simultaneously increasing vitality. This herb is an adaptogen (balances the stress response), providing increased energy and deeper immune support. Astragalus is particularly indicated for those under chronic stress.

There have been many clinical studies showing how Astragalus encourages an increase in immune cell activity, production and function. This botanical can trigger heightened activity from sedentary immune cells, increase the number of macrophages (cells that destroy pathogens and damaged tissue), and boost natural killer cell activity (virus removal) five- to six-fold.



For prevention of the common cold, 4-7 g per day is commonly used. To address an active infection, daily doses up to 28 g per day are indicated.

Echinacea (E. purpurea, E. angustifolia, E. pallida)

Echinacea is a well-studied botanical that has long been used for its ability to reduce susceptibility to colds and flus. Numerous studies have established this herb as an immune modulator, antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory and wound healer. Echinacea exerts its benefits by increasing phagocyte production in the bone marrow, and by stimulating macrophage and monocyte activity. Essentially, these immune cells are responsible for destroying bacteria and viruses. Two additional benefits include this botanical's ability to prevent pathogens from breaking down tissue and, further, its regeneration of damaged tissue. In 2007 The Lancet published a meta-analysis

reporting the benefits of Echinacea, stating a 58% reduction in contracting the common cold, and an average reduction of 1.4 days in the duration of a cold.

To boost the immune system, a minimum dose of 900 mg per day of dried root is recommended. To prevent habituation, use the herb for 10-14 days, and then take a three-day break. If using a commercial product, follow the manufacturer's dosing recommendations (as preparations vary in strength), and look for a product containing 1-2 mg of alkylamides per dose. While Echinacea is a relatively safe herb, it may affect certain conditions, or the way some drugs and supplements are metabolized. Seek medical advice from your Naturopathic Doctor if you have an autoimmune condition, or are on any medications and/or supplements.

Garlic (*Allium sativum*)

Garlic has long been used by healthcare providers. A 2004 study published in *International Immunology* corroborates that the organosulfur compounds in garlic are responsible for stimulating lymphocytes (antimicrobial immune cells). There is one downside, however—it must be consumed raw. Since many people cannot deal with the digestive or social consequences of raw garlic, garlic supplements provide a nice alternative.

At the onset of symptoms, it is advisable to take 200-300 mg, three times a day. Once the symptoms subside, reduce your intake to 200-300 mg daily. As a preventative measure, consider eating two cloves of raw garlic per day.

Neutraceuticals

Zinc

Zinc truly is the most important immune mineral. It increases the size of the thymus gland, the conductor of the immune orchestra. Without a healthy thymus, the immune system is powerless. Zinc has also been studied extensively for its antibacterial and antiviral properties. Just remember, zinc is one of those nutrients where more is not better. Too much can cause immune suppression; so don't take doses higher than 60 mg per day for prolonged periods.

Vitamin C

Vitamin C increases IgA to stop invaders from entering our digestive tract. It also has antimicrobial properties, increases T-cell (immune cell) action and intracellular glutathione (a powerful antioxidant). At the onset of symptoms, consider taking vitamin C to bowel tolerance i.e. 1,000 mg, every two hours until you experience loose stool—that indicates that you've surpassed saturation. Once saturation is determined, maintain a dose 1,000 mg lower until cold or flu symptoms subside. Note diabetics should never take supplemental vitamin C

as it increases their risk of cardiovascular events ex. stroke, heart attack.

Vitamin D

Vitamin D, also known as the “sunshine vitamin”, is essential for a healthy immune system. This pre-hormone powerfully regulates immune tolerance and resistance to infection. A 2009 systematic review of 13 controlled trials showed positive results for the treatment and prevention of bacterial and viral upper respiratory tract infections using vitamin D. Other studies have reported a decreased recurrence of illness in children with a history of frequent infections, and decreased infections in women with healthy vitamin D levels.

Living in the northern hemisphere predisposes us to vitamin D deficiency. Your health care practitioner can test your blood levels and recommend the appropriate dosage of vitamin D. For us sun-starved Canucks, 2,000IU per day is well tolerated throughout the fall and winter. If you suffer from arteriosclerosis, hypercalcemia, lymphoma, renal disease, sarcoidosis or tuberculosis, have your doctor monitor your vitamin D levels regularly while supplementing.

Lifestyle

Contrast Showers

Contrast hydrotherapy (alternating hot and cold water) has been used medicinally for thousands of years for ailments ranging from anxiety to pneumonia. Hot water creates vasodilation, thus enhancing blood and immune cell circulation. Cold water creates vasoconstriction, pumping debris and dead cells away from healthy tissues. Alternating hot and cold water treatment can positively impact immune function, improve stress response, and alleviate insomnia. To boost your immune system do three cycles of hot:cold in a 3:1 ratio at the end of your shower ex. 30 seconds hot:10 seconds cold. Always end on cold.

Recipe Corner

Zucchini Pancake

A long-standing Sears' family favorite that even our toddlers enjoy. The recipe makes one, thick, 8-inch pancake, or you can make smaller ones.

1 cup (or more)	shredded zucchini
1	whole egg
1/2 teaspoon	baking powder
1 dash	of salt
1 tablespoon	sunflower or sesame seeds (for children over four)

fruit spread or mild salsa for topping

Stir ingredients together without over-beating. Bake on a preheated griddle. Before flipping, sprinkle on sunflower or sesame seeds, if desired. Serve with fruit spread or salsa.

Enjoy!

In summary, your best offense is a strong defense. After all, no one wants to spend his or her holidays curled up with a box of tissues.

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