

just health

Build up your immune system naturally

Many easily available natural treatments work powerfully with the body in maintaining and building up the immune system.

BY ROBIN RITTERMAN

Are you concerned about AIDS, ARC, frequent colds and sore throats, or about just being too tired? Do you seem to be extra sensitive to certain foods or dust, or have a problem with yeast? If so, your immune system may need to be strengthened.

The immune system is the body's tool for protecting itself against invasion by foreign substances, such as viruses, bacteria and allergic materials. It is a system that helps your body maintain a healthy balance, free of infection. When you get tired, stressed out or emotionally upset your immune system often gets overworked, leading to lowered resistance and greater chance of getting sick. Many medications (notably antibiotics) are prescribed for fighting infections. These drugs take over the job of your immune system and kill the organisms that are causing the problem. But with long-term use of drugs the immune system gets weaker and weaker and loses the ability to protect the body.

There are things you can do to build

your immune system, so that the body can protect itself and keep you feeling strong and healthy. Many natural treatments exist which work gently yet powerfully with the body. Some can be done at home, others can be prescribed by a natural health care practitioner.

Diet: The role of good nutrition in maintaining a healthy immune system cannot be overemphasized. A diet high in fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grains (such as brown rice, barley, millet, cracked wheat) provides optimal amounts of vitamins, minerals and other essential nutrients. Foods should be eaten in their most natural, least processed form. Chemical additives and preservatives should be avoided since they place an added stress on the immune system, particularly the liver which breaks down unwanted substances.

Eating sweets decreases your body's ability to fight infections. This includes sugar (brown or white), honey, maple syrup, fruit sugar, and even fruit juices. These foods have been shown to decrease the activity of immune cells and should be avoided (fruit juices can be diluted with water) whenever you have a cold, flu or

any other type of infection in your body. Eating fatty foods (fried foods, beef, pork, butter, cream, hard cheese) also make it more difficult for the immune system to operate. (A high fat diet should also be avoided since it is linked with increased risk of heart disease and certain cancers.)

Drinking alcohol and using recreational drugs depress the immune system. These substances deplete the body of important nutrients, place an extra strain on the liver and increase the time needed for healing; they should be avoided especially when trying to support immune functioning.

Supplements: Many vitamins and minerals can stimulate the immune system to work better. Three of the most important are vitamin A, vitamin C and the trace mineral zinc. These three nutrients can increase the number and action of your immune cells. However, these substances can have harmful effects if taken in too large dosages or even in low dosages in certain individuals (i.e. pregnant women) so it is best to consult with a health care practitioner before adding them to your daily routine.

Herbs: Certain naturally occurring plant substances can help the body fight against infection. Garlic is one of the most widely known and used. The medicinal value of garlic has been recognized throughout history in many parts of the world. Garlic has a strong action against many types of bacteria, viruses, yeast and intestinal parasites. Other foods in this family, such as onions, have similar, although weaker, effects. Adding 1 or 2 cloves of garlic (preferably uncooked) to your food each day is an easy, inexpensive way to help boost the immune system. (A few drops of peppermint oil make a nice-smelling breath freshener.)

Licorice, the same plant used to make licorice candy is another tasty way to help build your immunity. Licorice has strong medicinal effects and has been used successfully to treat hepatitis B infections in Japan. It is currently being tested for its use in treating AIDS. Licorice can be taken as a tea or in a more concentrated tincture. Because long-term use of licorice can cause dangerous side effects including high blood pressure, swelling and heart failure, a health practitioner should be consulted before this herb is used as an immune stimulant.

Echinacea, also known as Purple Kansas Coneflower, is a beautiful purple flower that has recently been recognized as

having a strong effect on the immune system. This plant has been used for hundreds of years by Native American and European herbalists for fighting infections and maintaining health. Current research has shown that echinacea has activity against certain cancers (i.e., lymphocytic leukemia) and stimulates T-cells and interferon production. This herb is taken in tincture or in capsule form.

Many other plants have equally powerful effects on the immune system. Good quality herbal products may be obtained at Atlantis Rising, Nature's Fresh Northwest and the Portland Naturopathic Clinic.

Acupuncture: Practiced for over 3000 years in China, acupuncture is just beginning to be recognized in the U.S. for its powerful healing effects. From colds and flu to dysentery and hepatitis — acupuncture is showing remarkable results.

Extremely thin needles are inserted in special points around the body producing effects that range from pain relief to stimulating the cells which fight infection. Acupuncture is an extremely safe form of therapy and is much less painful than most people imagine. In fact, many people find it a very pleasurable experience. It has few side effects and can be extremely powerful in enhancing the recuperative powers of the body.

Homeopathy: This branch of medicine is based on the principle, similar to that of immunizations, that substances which cause problems in healthy people can cure these problems when given in extremely low doses. For example, a minute amount of bee venom has been used effectively to treat serious allergic reactions to bee stings.

Homeopathic medicines are prepared specially to be active yet non-toxic. They are taken orally and are quite palatable. Homeopathy has been used effectively to treat numerous chronic and acute conditions, from arthritis to kidney infections, from colitis to sore throats. Homeopathic medicines stimulate the body's own regenerative powers and build immunity.

In this article I have attempted a brief overview of some of the most commonly used, most effective approaches to building the immune system. Many can be combined to produce a more holistic program.

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IF YOUR DOCTOR ISN'T HELPING YOU, MAYBE YOU NEED ANOTHER KIND OF DOCTOR

If you are suffering from chronic health problems such as allergy, headache, constipation, arthritis, fatigue, or lower back pain, a naturopathic doctor may be able to help where others have failed. Naturopaths are trained in laboratory and clinical diagnosis, botanical medicine, homeopathy, nutrition, spinal manipulation, massage, counseling, and other natural therapies that enhance your body's own healing powers (they also *feel* good.) These therapies often will help when conventional medical methods do not. They can also be used as preventive medicine to enhance your immune system or keep more serious illnesses from developing.

The PORTLAND NATUROPATHIC CLINIC, located at the National College of Naturopathic Medicine, is known throughout the country as the foremost teaching clinic in natural healing methods, and specializes in the treatment of chronic or acute illnesses without surgery or synthetic drugs.



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