

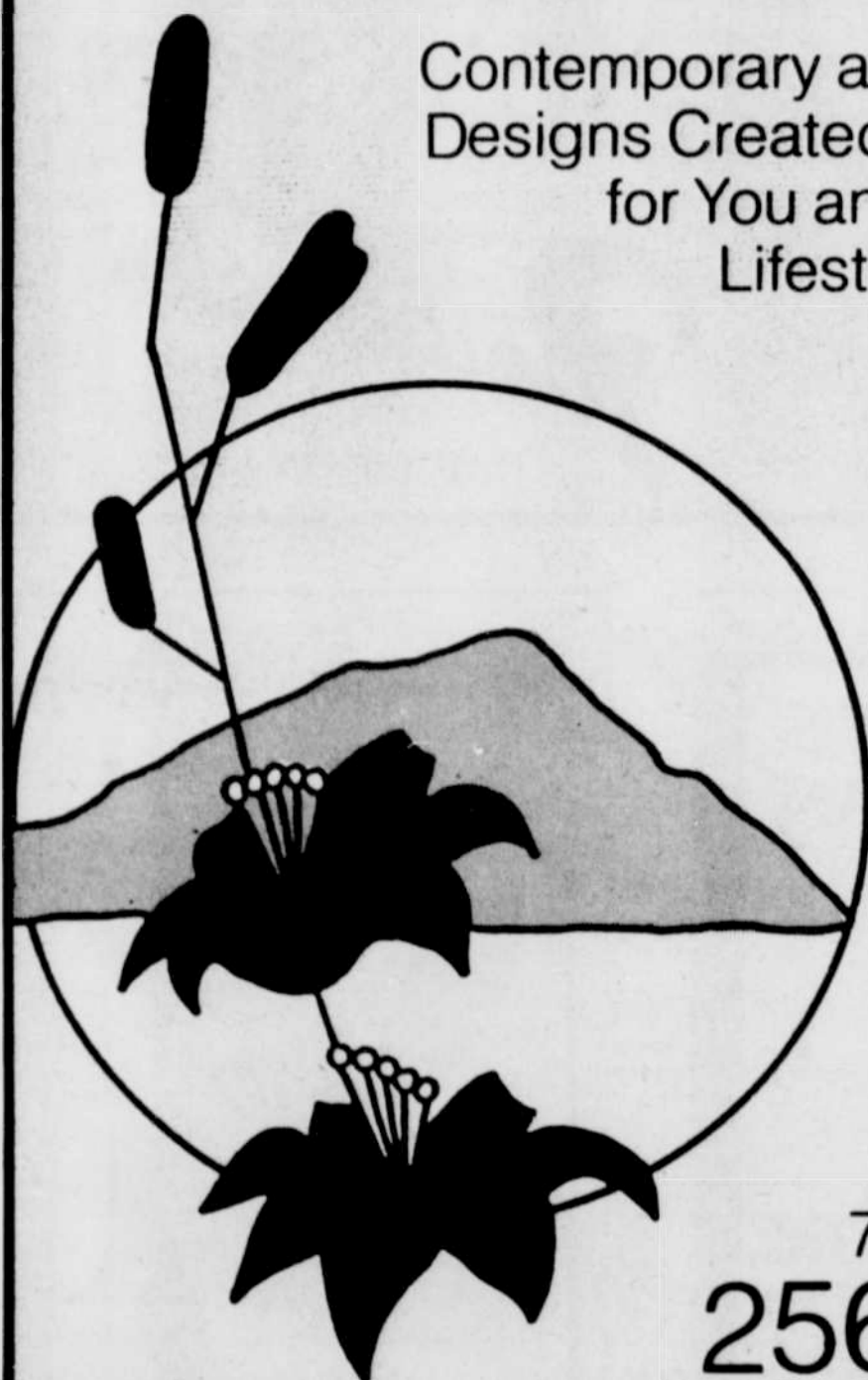
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just health

The immune system: Part two

Good immune habits are simple because there is considerable overlap between what is good for one area of the immune system and another.

BY STEVEN BAILEY, N.D.

In the May issue of *Just Out*, I wrote about the human immune system and the "germ theory." Part two will concentrate on how we can build and maintain a healthy immune system.

A healthy immune system involves a number of factors. High on this list are: a common-sense lifestyle, good nutrition and stress management. Less controllable factors include heredity and trauma (including congenital) which destroys or damages component(s) of the immune system. Certain cancers and diseases can also damage immune processes.

Before I discuss what we can do to assist our immune system, I would like to briefly mention the major components of immunity.

- 1) **White blood cells, Lymphatic system.**
- 2) **Skin and tissue barriers.**
- 3) **The liver.**
- 4) **Adrenal and kidney function.**

All four areas can be assisted by our own actions. While the immune interactions of the above-mentioned areas are quite complex, the programs to assist them are generally simple and often aid all four areas simultaneously.

- 1) **White blood cells and the lymphatic system:**

We continue to learn more and more about the white blood cells and how to aid their production, action and survivability. Two specific nutrients are needed for all cell reproduction. These are Vitamin A (I prefer the water-soluble form called beta-carotene) and the mineral Zinc. These two nutrients are important for nearly all bodily functions and their use in helping maintain good skin and tissue integrity cannot be underemphasized. Functional support includes the mineral magnesium and the vitamins C, B-complex, especially B-6, and bioflavonoids.

To help white blood cells survive longer, Vitamins C and E are helpful. Good fluid intake is essential for lymphatic drainage. Fluids to consume would be vegetable juices, water, herb teas and diluted fruit juices. Broths such as miso and chicken are also helpful. Fluids such as milk, coffee, pop and alcohol are counter-productive to good elimination.

Herbs that can aid in immune support include echinacea (shown to increase the number of WBCs), garlic, onions and cayenne. These are all herbs that have minimal toxicity and can be safely taken by the general public.

- 2) **Skin and tissues:**

Again, Vitamin A and/or beta carotene with zinc are very important for healthy skin and tissues. Sulphur and Vitamin C are also helpful.

- 3) **The liver:**

Breakdown of waste products is an essential aspect of immune function. Exercise, avoidance of coffee and excessive alcohol and the B-complex vitamins are

helpful for good liver function. Thyroid levels may be important in some individuals. The thyroid releases a hormone which helps regulate metabolism or the speed and strength of most bodily functions, i.e., low thyroid equals slow chemical breakdown, low energy, etc.

- 4) **Adrenal and kidney function:**

The adrenal gland has immune function as well as stress-related functions. The release of stress is critical to a good immune system and exercise, B-6 and Vitamin C are helpful in this area. The kidney as a filter system that dumps waste products into the urine is primarily dependent upon good fluid levels. The less you drink, the less you can eliminate in the urine.

As you can see there is considerable overlap between what is good for one area of the immune system and another. This is why good immune habits are so simple.

Primary concerns for the immune system include the specific nutrients listed above which can be aided by a diet high in fresh green vegetables and grains and good fluid intake (4-6 glasses per day). Avoiding immune weakening foods which include high sugar, coffee, and high fat is as important as eating the right foods. Milk and dairy will worsen most mucous concerns (congestion). If you suffer from chronic congestion, consider eliminating dairy products.

Allergies go hand in hand with a weakened immune system. If your WBCs are working to fight off an allergic product, they have a weakened capacity to fight off infections. Allergies can be determined in a variety of ways. One low-cost alternative is to pay careful attention to your diet in a diary. Note symptoms (congestion, stiff joints, diarrhea, etc.) and absence of symptoms on a day by day basis. Often the foods you crave most are the ones you are the most sensitive to.

Stress is an important factor in immune health. High stress has been shown to decrease WBC production as well as to interfere with normal blood flow and repair processes. Again, exercise, high Vitamin C, proper stress management (communication, relaxation, avoidance of stimulants) and the B Complex will aid in the ill effects of stress.

Cleansing programs: One of my favorite and most trusted aids is the vegetable juice fast. This type of program provides high nutrition (especially B-carotene), elimination of allergies and an optimum environment for "catching up" with elimination. For specific information on the Cascade Rejuvenation Program, an 11-day program including 5 days of live juices, write to the Northwest Naturopathic Clinic, 2606 NW Vaughan, Portland, OR 97210 or call 224-8083 for a free brochure.

It is never too late to begin strengthening your immune system, nor is it too late to improve your life style. Safe-sex, good nutrition, a sane lifestyle, and a good attitude will go a long way towards improving the quality of your life.