



PROTECT *your* HEALTH!

FIVE WAYS TO BUILD A STRONG IMMUNE SYSTEM

Have you ever noticed how some people seem to catch every bug that goes around, yet others never get sick? The difference is some people have a stronger immune system than others. The immune system protects us from colds, flu, and other ailments. But when it fails to do its job, the consequences are more sick days.

The good news is, there are lots of things we can do to strengthen our immune system immediately so we don't have to suffer through cold and flu season. These changes include getting enough sleep, eating properly, reducing stress and...

TAKING THE RIGHT SUPPLEMENTS

Out of every 10 people you see walking down the street, nine of them lack at least one critical vitamin or mineral necessary for good health. You may think you have a healthy lifestyle, but even with the best diet, you still may not be giving your body everything it needs. That's where supplements come in.

It's important to choose supplements that absorb rapidly, such as liquids or powders. Too often tablets don't break down fast enough and end up going down the drain... literally.

VITAMIN D

When it comes to choosing which supplements are right for you, vitamin D is a good place to start. It's vital to a healthy immune system, and a staggering three-fourths of Americans aren't getting enough of it.

Dr. Denise Millstine specializes in integrative medicine at the Mayo Clinic. She says vitamin D is so crucial to our overall health it's actually more of a hormone than it is a vitamin.

"Vitamin D is really important for a lot of medical conditions," she explains, "We see it associated with cancers, we see it associated with falls in the elderly, we see it associated with many symptoms: achiness, some mood issues, but also we see it associated with some infections and some issues with the immune system."

Our bodies create vitamin D naturally, when we're exposed to sunlight. However, most of us need a vitamin D supplement because we don't spend a lot of time in the sun, and when we do go out, we wear sunscreen, which blocks the absorption of vitamin D.



SUPPLEMENTS

MULTIVITAMIN

Next, consider a multivitamin supplement.

“It’s kind of a safety mechanism that could be added on board to support your immune system and overall health in general,” says Dr. Millstine.

The reason we need an all-around multivitamin is because even if we eat a healthy, well-balanced diet (which most people do not), our food isn’t as nutritious as it once was. We all know we should be eating fresh fruits and vegetables, but did you know those very same foods no longer help us fight off illness as well as they used to?

For example, apples contain 77 percent fewer minerals than they did 80 years ago. That’s because the dirt in which the apples grow is depleted of nutrients. Over-farming has robbed the soil of the micro-nutrients necessary for not only apples, but all fruits and vegetables.

The problem isn’t just in the soil. These days, many fruits and vegetables are picked before they are ripe, and are shipped long distances, while being exposed to light and air along the way.

Dr. Millstine says locally-grown produce is healthier and, as a bonus, less expensive, than produce that is shipped from far away.

“We worry that when fruits and vegetable travel long distances, or are exposed to a lot of different chemicals,” she says, “That their health benefits are really compromised.”

Dr. Millstine recommends choosing a multivitamin that is geared towards your own body, such as one that is especially made for your age group or gender. She says the best multivitamins contain 100 percent of the recommended daily allowance of a wide variety of vitamins and minerals. She also recommends paying attention to what’s not in your multivitamin.

“So no added colors,” she explains, “no added chemicals, and ideally, no added sugars, which you’re going to find in many of the ‘gummy’ formulations that a lot of people like.”

HERBAL SUPPLEMENTS

In addition to vitamins, some herbal supplements, also known as botanicals, can also help you fight off illness.

GINSENG

Many people take ginseng for energy and memory, but it can also strengthen your immune function.

“There is some scientific evidence for ginseng, particularly in preventing colds,” says Dr. Millstine, “so a lot of people will opt to take that in cold and flu season regularly as a preventative agent.”

Fact Resources

Denise M. Millstine, M.D. joined Mayo Clinic Women’s Health Internal Medicine in 2013. She is a Senior Associate Consultant with Mayo Clinic and Instructor in Medicine at the Mayo Clinic College of Medicine.

A board-certified internal medicine physician, Dr. Millstine completed her M.D. degree at Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine. She completed an Internal Medicine residency at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center and a fellowship in Integrative Medicine at the University of Arizona.

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ECHINACEA

Echinacea can strengthen your immunity by increasing the number of white blood cells, which kill cold and flu bugs.

“This is very popular,” states Dr. Millstine. “People who are interested in taking echinacea should take 100 milligrams three times a day and they need to start it early if they want it to be effective.”

Dr. Millstine recommends start taking echinacea about three weeks before the start of cold and flu season, such as in the month of October, and continue taking it throughout the winter.

FISH OIL

A fish oil supplement is also a good idea because fish oil contains omega-3 fatty acids, which boost your immune system. Unfortunately, most Americans rarely eat fish, especially the kind of fish that is rich in omega-3s, such as the fatty, cold-water type, like salmon. Sadly, much of the fish that contains healthy omega-3 fatty acids also contains dangerous mercury from environmental pollutants. So doctors caution against eating too much fish at the risk of ingesting too much mercury. This is especially important for pregnant women.

Grass-fed beef contains omega-3 fatty acids. However, these days, most Americans consume beef that has been fed corn, so the omega-3 content is much lower or non-existent.

“Omega-3 fatty acids are also something that we have depleted in our diet,” explains Dr. Millstine. “We used to get them when we would eat a lot of fish or a lot of pasture-raised cattle, for example. We no longer really do.”

Fish oil is made up of two fatty acids, EPA and DHA. DHA helps improve brain function and fight depression. When selecting fish oil, check the label to make sure it tells you how much DHA is in each serving. Then try to take enough fish oil so that you’re ingesting about one gram of DHA daily.

COCONUT OIL

Another powerful immune-booster is coconut oil. Take a tablespoon or two a day and cook with it. Lab tests reveal it destroys flu viruses as well as bacteria that cause infections, even parasites that lead to stomach problems. It’s the 12-carbon lauric acid (medium chain triglyceride, or MCT) in coconut oil that makes it such an effective tool in preventing infections. Almost half of the fatty acid in coconut oil is lauric acid.

VIRUSES AND FUNGI HELP TO STAVE OFF INFECTIONS

Almost 50 percent of the fatty acid in coconut oil is the 12-carbon lauric acid. Lauric acid has been shown to kill the bacteria *Staphylococcus aureus* (a very dangerous pathogen) and the yeast *Candida albicans*, a common source of yeast infections.

Dr. Beverly Teter is a lipid biochemist who conducts dietary fat research at the University of Maryland. She says coconut oil is a natural way to prevent bacterial and viral infections.

“The coconut oil tends to keep the bacteria down,” she explains, “so that if you’re assaulted with a virus your immune system can concentrate on the virus. It doesn’t have to concentrate on 27 other bacteria that day.”

PROBIOTICS

Did you know that 70 percent of our immune system is in our intestines, also known as our gut? That's where much of the good bacteria lives... yes, good bacteria! We've been told for so long that bacteria is the enemy. In some cases that is true. But as Dr. Millstine points out, there are lots of bacteria residing in our gut that are good because they kill other types of invaders that can make us sick.

"So the issue with bacteria in our body is very complicated. And we're just coming to learn how important it is that we have these healthy bacteria, and that we set up an environment in our body to allow those healthy bacteria to grow and to flourish."

Unfortunately, there are lots of lifestyle choices we make that kill those healthy bacteria, and when they're not around to do their jobs, we can get sick. For instance, when we take an antibiotic, that drug kills many of the good bacteria. Also, things like antibacterial soaps and cleansers, even a diet high in sugar and processed food can diminish the amount of healthy bacteria we have.

We can fix that problem by feeding our bodies probiotics, such as fermented foods like kimchi and plain yogurt. However, since many of us don't get enough probiotics in our diet, a probiotic supplement is a good way to restore good bacteria to our intestines.

VITAMIN C

Another great way to ward off illness is by taking a vitamin C. Studies show it is effective in combating the common cold. It supports normal growth and development, and helps us absorb iron.

Research indicates it also improves your attitude. In a study of hospitalized patients, researchers observed an elevation in mood after they received vitamin C. Likewise, scientists tell us people who are deficient in vitamin C can often experience feelings of fatigue and depression.

Our bodies do not produce or store vitamin C, so we should take it every day. Dr. Millstine says any extra vitamin C that we don't need will be flushed out of our bodies in our urine.

"I think 1,000 milligrams is a safe dose that's not too high," she said. "And I don't think there's any reason to take vitamin C daily over 2,000 milligrams."

WHICH BRAND?

The FDA does not regulate supplements the same way it does food and drugs. As a result, some products don't actually contain what the label claims they contain. However, there are ways to make sure you're getting what you want.

If you're not sure which brand to buy, Dr. Millstine recommends choosing ones with the USP seal on the label. This seal is awarded by the U.S. Pharmacopeial Convention, a scientific, nonprofit organization. USP-verified supplements are products that have been voluntarily submitted to the USP Dietary Supplement Verification Program and have successfully met the program's stringent testing criteria.

"If you see the USP seal, you know the supplement you're taking has what it says it has in it, and you can take that with confidence," she said.

Another way to know whether a supplement contains what it says it does is by checking with Consumerlab.com (<http://www.consumerlab.com>), which costs money. This organization tests supplements to determine whether they actually deliver what they promise on their label.

So consider supplements to strengthen your immune system. In a perfect world, we wouldn't need them. For our less-than-perfect lifestyles, they're a good safety net.

Note: Before beginning any new health regimen, it is important to consult your family physician or health care professional first. The information given in this publication is for your consideration. It is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease. Before starting or stopping any exercise routine or nutritional supplementation, please consult your family physician or health care professional about any contraindications that would make doing so inadvisable. This information is not intended as a substitute for the medical advice of physicians. The readers should regularly consult a physician in matters relating to his/her health and particularly with respect to any symptoms that may require diagnosis or medical attention.