

A Season Without Cold and Flu

Well, the cold and flu season is upon us again. Many will suffer the sore, itchy throat, runny nose and congestion, and lack of energy that are associated with a cold. Others will suffer the added symptoms of chills, fever, and possible headache that are associated with the flu. But why do some only experience mild symptoms, or no symptoms at all, when exposed to the cold or flu virus, and others suffer for many days with the symptoms associated with the cold or flu.

The first thing to realize is that the virus is only indirectly responsible for the symptoms that we experience. The virus would be able to replicate to a greater extent and ultimately cause more damage to our bodies if it could remain undetected. This means that symptoms are counterproductive for its survival. It is our immune system that detects the invader and mobilizes defenses against it which causes the symptoms we recognize as being infected with the cold or flu.

The immune system should first encounter the cold or flu virus in the mucous membranes of the mouth, eyes, or upper respiratory tract (nose, sinuses, etc.). If the immune system has a quick and strong response against the virus at this initial site of exposure, the symptoms may be mild or even undetectable for the short period of infection. If there is a slow or weak response at this site then the virus will be able to multiply and travel deeper into the bodies tissues. At this point the immune system must utilize more of its resources, and a strong response at this stage will create noticeable symptoms.

For the most part supporting, not suppressing, symptoms will help the immune system to do its job. Otherwise, the suppression of symptoms will extend the duration of infection or create more chronic or recurrent disease.

The immune system is the key to fighting off an infective organism, but the immune system does not work in isolation, and the health of all the other systems in the body has an effect on the ability of the immune system to do it's job. Building a strong immune system and maximizing the health of your body is not an overnight occurrence. The building blocks of immune system health include stress management, proper quality and duration of sleep, and proper nutrition. There will be other things to consider, but these will be dependent on the individual. If you find yourself already infected with the flu or cold virus then it is probably too late to build up the immune system for this particular infection, but you can still support the immune system in it's actions and help it to eliminate the infection, then build up the immune system for the next time you are exposed.

Your Naturopathic Physician at the Integrated Health Clinic can help you to build up your immune system and improve your overall health before you are exposed, or help you to rid yourself of the infection if it has already appeared. And for those who wish to have some added protection, we offer an easy to administer and highly effective homeopathic prevention protocol and/or IV vitamin and mineral packs. Make your appointment today and we will put together a health promoting plan for your particular needs.

General recommendations for preventing the Cold and Flu viruses

Things to avoid or reduce

- refined sugar and simple carbohydrates
- dairy products (dairy promotes the formation of excess mucous)
- stress (herbs to help reduce the effects of stress on the body include Siberian Ginseng , Withania, and Astragalus, which is why these are known as immune boosting herbs)
- alcohol
- excess oils and fats
- rancid nuts and seeds
- over exercising (any major stress on the body will decrease immune function)
- overexposure to dampness or extremes in temperature

Things to implement or increase

- garlic (excellent anti-viral, but only when it is freshly crushed; as soon as you cut or crush garlic the anti-viral compound begins to break down)
- washing hands (you can't avoid airborne viruses by washing your hands, but you can limit the transfer of viruses or bacteria from objects to your mouth, nose, or eyes)
- adequate sleep (most people require an uninterrupted 7-8 hours per night)
- vegetables (a variety of vegetables will provide adequate levels of most vitamins and minerals needed for proper immune function)
- adequate calories (too much or too few calories can weaken the immune system)
- green foods rich in chlorophyll (such as wheat and barley grass, spirulina, and chlorella)
- moderate regular exercise (unlike excessive exercise, this will stimulate the immune system)
- Echinacea for prevention (quality is very important with any herbal product)
- Zinc (important in maintaining healthy immune function)
- Vitamin D (deficiencies in vitamin D increase the risk of influenza, pneumonia, and other immune related diseases)
- Vitamin C (many people benefit from high doses of vitamin C [3 grams or more] at the first signs of a cold or flu)