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Natural Flu Remedies

Learn How to Boost the Immune System to Combat the Flu

BY LINDA EGENES

With kids back at colleges and schools across the nation, everyone is wondering how to avoid getting the flu this fall. In the U.S. alone, an estimated 25 to 50 million cases of the flu are currently reported each year—leading to 150,000 hospitalizations and 30,000 to 40,000 deaths yearly. And while health authorities race to develop a flu vaccine for specific strains, they can only advise us to avoid traveling to affected areas and to wash our hands frequently to avoid the spread of germs.

Yet there is so much more that we can do to boost the immune system. In fact, the ancient science of Maharishi Ayurveda specializes in just this area: strengthening the body's natural defenses. Even now, with this new virus testing our immune systems, there's time to brush up on flu prevention.

If your body is filled with toxins, infection will find fertile ground for spreading disease, just as land that is fertile will sprout many seeds. Symptoms of the sticky, obstructive toxins that result from undigested food are stiff joints, sluggish digestion, dullness or headaches, and fatigue. If your digestion is strong and there is lightness and strength in your body, then the seeds of infection will not be able to take hold.

Here are five natural flu remedies and tips to boost your immune system.

1. Schedule a fall cleanse. Fall is a season of change—when the warm, humid days of summer are changing to the cool, dry, windy weather of autumn. This fluctuating weather can make our digestion weaker and cause us to fall sick with colds and flu in the fall.

The flu prevention antidote? Avert the danger with a cleanse during the few weeks when the weather is making its transition from summer to fall. Fall cleansing serves two purposes. First, it clears the toxins that have built up in the summer. And because digestive strength tends to fluctuate when the seasons are changing, eating lighter during this transition can actually boost your immunity and help avoid sickness.

Cleansing doesn't mean that you have to fast for two weeks. It just means eating fresh, easy-to-digest foods that give your digestion a break and help it to process and eliminate toxins. Eat warm, cooked organic vegetables seasoned with spices, rice or whole grains such as quinoa and bulgar wheat, and for proteins favor soupy split-mung dal or other soups made from lentils or small legumes. Light dairy products, such as ghee (clarified butter), whole milk, and lassi (a probiotic digestion-enhancing drink made with water and freshly made yogurt) improve digestion and enhance immunity. Avoid eating cold foods and drinks, fried foods, hard cheeses, and meat during this time. And drink plenty of hot fluids between meals, such as hot water with lemon or herbal, uncaffeinated teas.

Eating lighter will fire up your digestion, eliminate toxins, and raise your immunity quotient. Maharishi Ayurveda also recommends taking a mild herbal laxative, such as senna tea, at night during this two-week cleanse.

2. Flavor your foods with an immune-boosting spice mixture. Mild spices actually boost digestive power and prevent toxins from building up. Here's a mixture you can make at home.

6 parts turmeric
3 parts ground cumin
3 parts ground coriander
6 parts ground fennel
1 part powdered dry ginger
1 part ground black pepper
1/4 part ground cinnamon

When cooking, measure one teaspoon of the spice mixture in one tablespoon of ghee and heat until aroma is released. Apply this to cooked rice, vegetables, or other dishes. These spices will support your immune system and digestion.

3. Take herbs to assist a cleanse and boost the immune system. Look for herbal formulas that will enhance a deep, gentle detoxification program.

4. Getting plenty of rest is a natural flu remedy. Lifestyle also impacts immunity. Staying up late, working at night, eating at irregular times, and sleeping during the day can all affect the digestion and body rhythms—and thus compromise the immune system. That's why it's important to follow the Ayurvedic daily routine, arising early in the morning, before 6 a.m., and retiring before 10:00 p.m. Using essential aroma oils such as lavender and sweet orange can create a calming, peaceful atmosphere conducive to sleep.

5. If you do fall sick, consult your doctor! Stay home, drink plenty of hot liquids, get plenty of bed rest, and follow all of the tips mentioned above to help strengthen you through illness faster with more comfort.

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