How to Boost Your Immune System

By: Dr. Alyssa Musgrove

Every day we are exposed to organisms that touch our skin, are inhaled, swallowed and inhabit our mucous membranes. The immune system is the body’s defense mechanism against sickness and disease. When the immune system is up to par, we stay healthy. When the immune system is compromised or underactive, we have a higher risk of developing health conditions and infections.

Flu season runs from October through May, with the worst activity occurring between December and February. Many people feel simply getting the flu vaccine will protect them from getting sick, however flu vaccines are not 100 percent effective. According to the CDC, in 2014-2015, the flu vaccine was only 19 percent effective. For those over the age of 65, it was shown to be only nine percent effective.

It is important to focus on maintaining a healthy immune system – especially this time of year. There are many things we can do to improve our immunity and decrease our risk of illness. An ounce of prevention is truly worth a pound of cure, so wash your hands frequently and avoid being around people who are ill. Below are a few more ways to stimulate your immune system:

**1. Reach for Oils:**

Essential oils like oregano, myrhh, cinnamon, frankincense and clove have immune-stimulating effects on the body. Oregano oil is known for its antifungal, antibacterial, antiviral and anti-parasite compounds. Myrhh also has antibacterial, antifungal and antiseptic properties. Clove contains 30 times more anti-oxidants than blueberries! (Antioxidants help protect the body against bad viruses and bacteria and reverse the damage of free radicals.) Cinnamon has protective, immune-boosting properties.

Clove, oregano and cinnamon oils are very hot and should be diluted before any use (at least 1 drop of essential oil to 3 drops carrier oil). Also, since the oils are very potent, they should not be taken for more than two weeks at a time.

**2. Try Echinacea:**

Echinacea has been shown to be powerful immune system stimulator. The University of Connecticut conducted a study that was published in the Lancet Infectious Diseases Journal that found echinacea can reduce the chance of catching a cold by 58 percent! The study also found echinacea reduces the duration of the common cold by almost one and a half days.

**3. Add Some Astragalus:**

Traditional Chinese medicine has been using Astragalus for thousands of years because of its adaptogen properties. Adaptogens are a unique class of healing plants that help balance, restore and protect the body making you even more resilient to the damaging effects chronic stress has on your immune system.

**4. Go for Ginger**

Research has found ginger can help restore proper function of the immune system. Ginger may also help cleanse the lymphatic system, which is our network of tissues that help rid the body of toxins and waste. Ginger is particularly effective in calming the body during bouts of nausea. It can be purchased as an essential oil, as well.

**5. Experiment with Elderberry**

Several studies have shown elderberry has the power to boost the immune system and help treat symptoms of the flu and common cold. Journal of International Medical Research found when elderberry was used within the first 48 hours of onset of symptoms, it reduced the duration of the flu, with symptoms being relieved within an average of four days.

**6. Boost Your Vitamin D**

In the winter, we are naturally getting less sunlight exposure. As a result of this, our body produces less vitamin D. Research shows that vitamin D promotes immunity and helps protect the body from infection. Consider adding some foods high in this important vitamin, including halibut, carp fish, mackerel, eel, salmon, maitake and portabella mushrooms, rainbow trout, cod liver oil, sardines, eggs and tuna.

**7. Reach for Fresh Juices**

Green juices, made with fruits and vegetables, are packed with antioxidants, phytochemicals, minerals and vitamins – all of which provide a huge boost to the immune system. Try this immune-boosting juice recipe:

Ingredients:

-1 bell pepper (red, green, yellow or orange)

-1 head/stem of broccoli

-1 lemon

-1 cucumber

-1 knob ginger

-1 TBS apple cider vinegar

Directions:

Add all ingredients except apple cider vinegar to a vegetable juicer. Pour juice in a glass and add apple cider vinegar. Stir gently and drink immediately. Makes 2 servings

*Pathways to Healing specializes in holistic chiropractic care. Dr. Alyssa Musgrove draws on a variety of techniques, including chiropractic, kinesiology, nutrition, food allergy testing and lifestyle counseling to assist clients in achieving optimal health and wellness in one setting. Pathways to Healing is located at 1022 Founders Row, Lake Oconee Village, Greensboro. The office can be reached at 706-454-2040.*