



Supercharge Your Immune System

Natural Ways to Stay Healthy

by Kathleen Barnes

Like many other health conditions, challenges to our immune systems are on the rise. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 26.5 million adults and kids have asthma, 50 million have allergies and up to 20 percent get the flu each year. Catching a cold is common, with U.S. adults generally coping with two or three a year and children about twice as many.

As many as 50 million Americans suffer from autoimmune diseases like rheumatoid arthritis, celiac and lupus, costing \$100 billion a year to treat, which is nearly twice the amount spent on cancer care, according to the American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association. Initial statistics released 20 years ago estimated that 9 million

Americans had autoimmune diseases; a five-fold increase since then illustrates the magnitude of the problem.

People that are free of some degree of immune system dysfunction are relatively uncommon.

Identified Culprits

“We are absolutely seeing a rise in immune disorders,” says Michael T. Murray, a doctor of naturopathy in Lyons, Colorado, and author of *Chronic Candidiasis: Your Natural Guide to Healing with Diet, Vitamins, Minerals, Herbs, Exercise and Other Natural Methods*. “Many factors are responsible for the increase.” He cites the most notable as the widespread use of antibiotics and pesticides; dietary factors, including too much

sugar; decreased intake of essential vitamins and minerals; overconsumption of calories in general; lifestyle factors like not getting enough sleep or exercise; excessive alcohol; stress; and exposure to cigarette smoke.

“The microbiome—the bacterial structure that supports a strong immune system—is largely inherited from the mother during a vaginal birth,” says Sayer Ji, of Miami, Florida, founder of *GreenMedInfo.com*, sponsor of the 2017 Immune Defense Summit and a member of the National Health Federation’s board of governors. “The rising number of Caesarean sections, at nearly one-third of all U.S. births, up from 18 percent in 1997, deprives infants of those naturally occurring bacteria, and can result in immune deficiencies at an early age.”

Low-level chronic stress of the kind that occurs in everyday modern life is a leading underlying factor in immune system compromise, says natural health and healing expert Dr. Deepak Chopra, of Carlsbad, California, author of *The Healing Self: A Revolutionary New Plan to Supercharge Your Immunity and Stay Well for Life*. Along with emotional stress, he points to any kind of inner or outer challenge that pulls us off center.

Everyone experiences some stress every day; when unrelieved, it's been widely shown to have a huge negative impact on our health. "Imbalance can be negative or positive, and so can stress," says Chopra. "Winning the lottery is just as stressful as going through a divorce. So the challenge isn't to achieve static balance, but to successfully thrive in stressful surroundings."

Internal Communiqués

Medical science now generally agrees that the greatest part of the immune system resides in the gut. "We need those trillions of bacteria that live in the digestive tract. Without them, we are unable to defend ourselves from all types of assaults, including the autoimmune diseases, in which the body turns upon itself," says Ji.

"The immune system lines the large and small intestines," says Dr. Susan Blum, of Rye Brook, New York, author of *The Immune System Recovery Plan: A Doctor's 4-Step Program to Treat Autoimmune Disease*. "The microbes in the gut lining speak to the immune system. Anything that alters the microbes in negative ways—like antibiotics or viral illness, among others—can also negatively alter the immune system."

Unavoidable Toxin

We can't avoid the toxic exposure that underlies much of the immune dysfunction we are experiencing today, says Wendy Myers, a functional diagnostic nutritionist

in Los Angeles, California, and author of *Limitless Energy: How to Detox Toxic Metals to End Exhaustion and Chronic Fatigue*.

"Toxins, especially heavy metals like lead and mercury, are in the air, water and soil. Since we can't escape them, we need to know how they are affecting us and work to neutralize them."

Experts agree that immune challenges can be neutralized and overcome with the right diet and lifestyle, stress management and appropriate supplements to restore and maintain the whole system balance needed to flourish in a world of our own making that stresses us on every level.

The Right Food

Eliminating wheat and dairy can end half of current immune system dysfunction through helping to repair the microbiome and healing the immune system, Ji believes. As one example, "If my mom had known I was allergic to cow's milk when I was a child, I wouldn't have suffered for 20 years with bronchial asthma," he says.

An anti-inflammatory diet also speeds gut healing and strengthens the immune system, says Blum. Highlights of her program for a basic clean-up include eliminating anything white (sugar and all products made with flour); eating quality fats (cold-pressed vegetable oils, nuts and seeds); protein (grass-fed beef, organic and free-range poultry, wild game and wild-caught fish); organic fruits and vegetables

as much as possible and fermented foods daily; limiting and preferably eliminating dairy; and reading labels and banishing additives, chemicals and processed foods.

According to CDC statistics, almost everyone has some level of immune dysfunction, so this clean-up diet will benefit most of us, Blum says. After a basic regimen of three weeks or longer, she recommends exploring an elimination and challenge diet in which gluten, dairy, corn, soy and eggs are all eliminated for three weeks. People with arthritis should also eliminate nightshades like tomatoes and potatoes. "Then add back in the eliminated foods one at a time and carefully note the body's reaction. It's not that hard to get a clear picture of what aggravates inflammation such as arthritis pain," Blum says.

The Right Supplements

Multivitamins: "High-quality vitamin and mineral supplements are foundational to immune health," Murray says. "Vitamins C, E and B and selenium are especially important."

Digestive enzymes: "Digestive enzymes are key to restoring gut health, and thereby healing the immune system. They're useful in reducing immune-mediated inflammation in autoimmune disorders," Murray explains.

Australian research from the Garvan Institute of Medical Research confirms that supporting the immune system helps

Flu Shot or Not

The effectiveness and safety of flu shots has long been questioned. At best, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reckons that the flu vaccine is 60 percent effective and less so for those older than 65. Plus, it admits it will have zero effect if scientists wrongly project which strains will be prevalent in the coming year. Having a strong immune system is the best bet to prevent flu, says Sayer Ji, founder of *GreenMedInfo.com*.

Further protection can be found in vitamin D, says Naturopathic Doctor Michael T. Murray. He notes, "It may prove to be more effective and less costly than conventional flu shots."

If a cold or flu strikes, Murray suggests zinc lozenges. For coughs, German research from the Department of Integrative Gastroenterology at the Kliniken Essen-Mitte shows that a South African medicinal plant, *Pelargonium*

sidoides, commonly known as *Umckloab* (an ingredient in Umcka ColdCare) is especially effective in treating coughs caused by colds, bronchitis and sinusitis.



heal inflammation and autoimmune diseases. Instead, these are commonly treated with immune system suppressants that leave the patient with diminished resistance to other diseases.

Raw foods, especially pineapple and papaya, are good sources of digestive enzymes. They're also available as supplements.

Prebiotics and probiotics: Prebiotics, plant fibers that ferment in the colon helping to increase desirable bacteria in the gut, and probiotics, live beneficial bacteria, help restore balance in the microbiome, effectively feeding and strengthening the immune system. Myers suggests that declining levels of friendly bacteria in the gut may actually mark the onset of chronic degenerative disease.

Vitamin D: Several studies, including one from Israel, have shown that people with the highest vitamin D levels have the lowest number of upper respiratory infections. "To ensure optimal vitamin D status, many health advocates, myself included, are recently advocating daily dosages of 2,000 to 5,000 international units (IU), even in apparently healthy adults," Murray says.

Beta glucan: Beta glucans are polysaccharides; soluble fiber naturally occurring in the cell walls of grains, bacteria, yeast, algae and fungi. Natural sources include oats, barley, seaweed, and shitake and reishi mushrooms. In supplements, look for products extracted by fermentation if grain or yeast is a concern. These sugars are known to help prevent and shorten durations of colds and flu and provide relief for allergies and sinus congestion, and may help regulate an overactive immune response in cases of autoimmune disorders.

Both internal and external factors can affect us all the way to the cellular level. Chopra says, "You are talking to your genes all the time, and what you say affects every cell in your body. Through lifestyle choices, you can make healing decisions rather than damaging ones."

Kathleen Barnes is the author of numerous natural health books including The Calcium Lie: What Your Doctor Still Doesn't Know, with Dr. Robert Thompson. Connect at KathleenBarnes.com.