



Naturopathic Flu Prevention

What is the immune system? Basically, it's a collection of many different types of cells that work together to fight infection. If your immune system is weak, you will suffer from frequent colds (more than 2 per year), chronic infections (such as fungal or yeast infections), sore or swollen lymph nodes, frequent cold sores, poor wound healing, or an infection that lingers for weeks without completely clearing up.

Many different factors influence how well your immune system functions:

1. **Sleep:** At least 8 hours of good quality sleep per night is essential to maintain healthy immunity. During sleep deprivation, the immune system can become weak (causing increased susceptibility to infection), or become over-active (causing allergic reactions).
2. **Stress:** Many people don't realize that your thoughts and emotions have an impact on your immune system. The hormones that are released when you feel stressed, including adrenalin and cortisol, directly suppress the immune system. The level of immune suppression is usually proportional to the level of stress experienced; the greater the stress, the weaker your immune system. Therefore, effective stress management is crucial in preventing colds and flu. Naturopathic medicine offers many stress-relieving treatments such as emotional counselling, acupuncture, nutritional support and herbal medicines that promote relaxation.
3. **Nutrition:** Nutrient deficiency has long been known as a major cause of a depressed immune system. It is now becoming more apparent that over-consumption of sugar also inhibits proper immune function. Eating sugars, syrups, honey, pop, fruit juice, alcohol, or refined flours (bagels, bread, pasta, white rice, pastries) significantly reduces the ability of white blood cells to kill bacteria and viruses. So if you are sick, or want to prevent catching a cold, stay away from sugar! In addition, it is important to eat a nutrient-dense diet to provide your body with immune-supporting nutrients like Vitamin A, C, E, and Zinc. Eating enough healthy protein is also essential to build strong immunity.
4. **Digestive Health:** The digestive tract is one of the most important organs in the defense against infections. 70-90% of our immune cells circulate through the digestive tract; therefore maintaining healthy digestion and a proper intestinal balance of healthy bacteria ("probiotics") is yet another way to improve your immune system.
5. **Physical Activity:** Being active increases your circulation and enhances the transportation of immune cells around your body. Exercise is also a great stress reliever, so it improves immunity by helping you to relax and get better sleep.
6. **Medications:** Some medications, such as antibiotics, may impair the immune system. If you need to take these medicines, it is important to take extra measures to support the immune system.

Of course it is best to bolster your immune system to prevent getting sick in the first place, but what should you do if you do come down with a nasty cold or flu? See your naturopathic doctor! Most people believe there is no cure for the common cold or flu, and that's absolutely not true! While antibiotics are generally not effective for colds and flu, there are many natural treatments that decrease the duration and severity of infections: acupuncture treatments, individually prescribed homeopathics, specialized herbal medicines and nutrients.

Remember that it's the strength of your immune system that determines whether or not you get sick, *not* only what bugs you're exposed to. We are exposed to bacteria and viruses on a daily basis! A properly functioning immune system is able to ward off infection regardless of how many family members or people at work are sick. Taking a holistic look at your physical, mental and emotional health is essential in building healthy immunity and keeping you feel great!

Prescription for a healthy immune system:

1. **Sleep**
2. **Relax**
3. **Eat nutritious foods**
4. **Maintain good digestive health**
5. **Keep active**
6. **Be aware of medication side effects**

Natural medicines to help maintain a healthy immune system:

1. **Vitamin D** – have your blood levels checked to determine what dose is best for you.
2. **Probiotics** – a good quality concentrated formula
3. **Whey protein powder** (or soy/rice protein for those who are sensitive to dairy products)



Special Information for the H1N1 Virus

Remember, the H1N1 flu has a 1.9% mortality rate, which isn't much more than the regular seasonal flu. H1N1 is still considered to have low mortality.

How can you tell if you've got a "cold" or a "flu"?

Symptom	Cold	Flu
Onset	Slowly start to feel sick	Sudden onset
Fever	Rare	Commonly high (39-40°C) and lasts 3-4 days
Headache	Rare	Prominent
Body aches	Slight	Common and often severe (most commonly the chest muscles in adults; leg muscles in children)
Extreme exhaustion / weakness	Never	Prominent
Runny nose	Common	Sometimes
Watery eyes	Common	Sometimes
Sore throat	Common	Common
Cough and chest discomfort	Mild to moderate hacking cough	Commonly dry cough with chest tightness, can be severe
Diarrhea, nausea and vomiting	Rare	Sometimes, especially in children

H1N1 Flu Prevention

1. **Hand washing** – wash your hands with soap for 15 seconds ten times per day! Washing your hands with soap removes the protective envelope surrounding the flu virus so that it can no longer stick to surfaces and spread.
2. **Vitamin D** – low vitamin D levels (less than 100 nmol/L on a blood test) increases risk of getting the flu.
3. **Probiotics** – supplementing with good quality concentrated probiotic formulas has been clinically proven to decrease susceptibility to the flu.
4. **Zinc** – low zinc levels also increase your risk of getting the flu because zinc is necessary for many different immune cells to function properly. Zinc deficiency can occur in all age groups, and is most common in the elderly.
5. **Selenium** – low selenium levels alter the body's ability to fight infection and increase susceptibility to flu viruses.
6. **Weight management** – obesity is an independent risk factor for getting the flu.
7. **Deep breathing** - by stretching the cells that line your lungs, it increases their own natural production of anti-infection defences and improves your immunity. All you need to do is take consecutive deep breaths, focusing on your exhalation being twice as long as your inhalation. Deep breathing exercises are also an important way to decrease stress which also has a strong immune-boosting effect.