



Colds & Flu

At this time of year, you may find yourself stuck in bed with the aches and pains of a cold or flu. While there are many reasons why colds and flu are more common during the winter months, that doesn't mean you have to feel miserable every winter! This newsletter will give you tips on how you and your family can prevent getting sick and also how to speed up recovery if you do catch a cold or flu.



To stay healthy it's important to have a properly functioning immune system. 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 your body devotes its energy to repairing and rejuvenating. There are many scientific studies indicating that sleep improves immune function. 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. Studies have also shown that positive social interactions help boost immune function, so don't isolate yourself during times of stress – spend time with friends or family.

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 consisting of plenty of vegetables (6-8 servings per day) and fruits (2-3 servings per day) to provide your body with immune-supporting nutrients like Vitamin A, C, E, and Zinc. Eating enough healthy protein (lean chicken, turkey, beans, nuts, seeds, eggs, tofu) 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 is yet another way to improve your immune system.
5. **Environment:** Poor air quality from pollution, smoking, dust, mold, and household sprays (such as air fresheners) stresses the immune system and increases its workload. Since the immune system's job is to protect you from foreign invaders, it may identify these sources of air pollution as the enemy. The more of your immune "soldiers" that are working to protect you from molds and other air pollutants, the less "soldiers" you've got left to fight bacterial or viral infections.
6. **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.

7. **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.

More on Stress...

Stress does indeed affect the immune system in powerful ways. Unremitting long-term stress suppresses the immune system leaving you more susceptible to getting sick. This can develop into a vicious cycle since research shows that the immune systems of the elderly or those already sick are more subject to stress-related changes.



So how can you decrease the stress in your life? Learn how to manage it!

Stress management is a huge topic in itself, but here is

brief summary of a few stress-relieving techniques: laughter, regular exercise, sleep, meditation, positive attitude, talking to someone (a friend or a health professional), healthy eating, good time management, and learning to say "no!" Naturopathic medicine offers many stress-relieving treatments such as emotional counselling, acupuncture, nutritional support and herbal medicines that promote relaxation.

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.

If you do get sick, what should you do?

1. **Rest:** Stay home from work and get plenty of sleep.
2. **Nutrition:** Eat simple foods like soups that provide fluids, nutrients and protein. Stay away from large meals, sugar and alcohol. Eat plenty of garlic, which boosts immune function and is anti-bacterial.
3. **Fluids:** Drink plenty of water and herbal teas. Stay away from fruit juices and pop because they contain high amounts of sugar.
4. **Stay warm:** Your body uses high temperature (fever) to kill invading bacteria and viruses. Help your body stay warm by bundling up, taking warm baths or showers, and warm fluids (teas and soups). Another great way to strengthen your body's defences is by using an infrared sauna.



Your naturopathic doctor offers individualized treatments to speed your recovery and prevent future infections.

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. Breathe clean air
6. Keep active
7. Be aware of the immunosuppressive effects of some medications