

Practical Preventable Medicine



The Common Cold And Immunity

Why do some people get lots of coughs and colds while others seem to cruise through winter with barely a sneeze? “I hardly ever get a cold” they cheerfully assert much to the frustration of others. So while conventional medicine attempts to boost immunity through immunisations, a lot of research has been done by complementary medicine to understand factors that affect our immune systems. Some of the most important factors include diet, stress and sleep.

It seems our ability to fight infection is directly related to adequate sleep, while increased stress levels also depress our immune response. Trials have shown that 20 minutes of meditation helps fight infections, so relax and get plenty of sleep if you’re run down. Recent studies on type 2 diabetes has found that eating sugar has a measurable decrease in immune function, so keep sugary foods to only a treat, not every day.

Supplementation to boost immunity depends on what you take when, vitamin A, C and E work best when taken prior to getting a cold. This includes cod fish liver oil for the kids (eg. Hypol) as this is full of vitamin A and D that is vital for immune function. Astragalus is a Chinese herb that has shown real promise in clinical trials in boosting immune cell count, as does Shitake and Reishi mushrooms. Zinc and selenium are important for fighting infection and is effective taken as a preventative as well as when you have a cold. Echinacea has shown repeatedly to be most beneficial when taken during the early phases of a cold, as well as Koran ginseng, while both are useful to take as winter approaches to boost what we know of in Chinese Medicine as your ‘defensive Qi’.

Food wise, this time of year eat nourishing warm slow cooked foods. Salads and raw foods are difficult to digest when your body is adjusting to a colder season and cold drinks also put cold in our tummies while the body is trying to keep warm so drink warm water and drinks. Stewed fruits are best so a great excuse to eat warming apple crumbles with cloves or poached pears and cinnamon as those spices are good at warming you on the inside.

Written by: Dr Angela Palmer - Kinglake Chinese Medicine
Chinese Medicine CMRBV REG AH/1347
Member AACMA 2154

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Remember antibiotics do nothing to viruses, only bacterial infections, while they kill your good digestive bacteria that have also been clinically shown to assist in immune function, so yogurt or Yakult is helpful. With a cold damp winter coming on, get into some immune boosting herbs now, and eat well, and talk to your natural health practitioner for suggestions on what would be effective for your health.

Until next time
Stay well
Dr Angie Palmer

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