

BOOSTING THE IMMUNE SYSTEM

Keeping our immune system strong helps protect us against illness and disease, especially during the winter months when staying healthy and energised requires more attention and care. Here are a few tips on how you can keep your immune system strong and healthy this winter



Immune-boosting yoga program

Yoga practice is increasingly being recognised as a highly efficient enhancer of many aspects of the immune system. Yoga not only increases the level of prana (life force) in the body, but also stabilises the emotions and calms the mind.

Breathing

Kraftsow, in his book *Yoga for Wellness*, explains that cold and flu infections, allergies, asthma and other chronic respiratory conditions are “directly linked to a weakened immune response” and to “disturbed, irregular habits of breathing”. Founder of the international Art of Living Organization, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, acknowledges that the breath is directly linked to the mind. Practising simple breathing techniques can have a profound effect on the mind and body. Don’t just believe it, try it – make an appointment for a one-hour breathing session to be conducted at your workplace.

Meditation

Many yoga practitioners say that 20 minutes of meditation is equivalent to three hours of sleep. Even just 10 minutes of meditation a day increases endorphins, decreases cortisol levels, and fosters positive states of mind to promote better health. And it’s those of us who are working hard who can benefit from meditation the most, as meditation brings clarity and focus to the mind, enabling us to achieve our goals in far less time.

Lifestyle

The following simple dietary and lifestyle tips can also strengthen the immune functions:

- » Avoid sugars, alcohol, caffeine and fat, as they suppress various immune functions. Caffeine and alcohol raise stress levels; alcohol depletes vitamins C and B6, which the body particularly needs in times of infection.
- » Drink plenty of water and herbal teas, or even a slice of ginger in hot water.
- » Vitamins C, A and zinc activate the immune system. Foods high in vitamin C include red capsicum, kiwi fruit, broccoli, brussel sprouts, red cabbage, strawberries, oranges and blackcurrants. Foods high in vitamin A include parsley, carrots, sweet potato, spinach and squash. Foods high in zinc include ginger root, pecans, split peas, almonds, pepitas, buckwheat and walnuts.
- » Increase your intake of fresh fruit and vegetables as they are high in vitamins, nutrients, fibre and most importantly – prana.
- » Decrease your intake of tinned food, takeaway food, reheated and microwaved food, and food that has been cooked more than three hours before it is eaten.
- » Herbal medicines such as Echinacea, Astragalus, Cats Claw and Chinese mushrooms Reishi and Shitake boost immune function and are antiviral and antibacterial.
- » Sleep. Sleeping problems can have many harmful consequences. According to National Sleep Foundation research, a lack of sleep can affect immune functions. Deep sleep or the non-REM phase of sleep is when immune-enhancing hormones such as interleukin-1 increase in production. If you are having difficulty sleeping at night, learning a few simple breathing techniques can make all the difference.
- » Exercise. Gentle to moderate regular exercise enhances immune functions, improves mood and decreases stress. What is the best type of exercise to do? The one you enjoy!
- » Choose to be happy! Our immune systems are tangibly energised when our attitude is optimistic and when we are happy. ‘Happiness’ is a state of mind we can actually choose to experience rather than one that ‘just happens’ to us – so choose to be happy, come what may!

About the author

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