



How to Boost your Immunity

by Patrick Holford

Are you fed up with getting colds and infections?

Here's how to stay bug-free and what to do to combat specific infections.

Your immune strength is totally dependent on an optimal intake of vitamins and minerals and other immune boosting nutrients. Since no nutrients work in isolation, it's good to supplement a good high strength multivitamin and mineral. The combination of nutrients at even modest levels can have a strong effect on boosting immunity. Dr Chandra and colleagues, in a research study published in the Lancet, gave such a multivitamin and mineral to 96 healthy elderly people, or a placebo. Those on supplement had less infections, had a stronger immune system as measured by blood test determination of immune factors and were generally healthier than those on placebo. As far as diet is concerned:

* Drink Cat's Claw tea daily.

* Eat plenty of colourful, varied fresh fruit and vegetables, especially those that are red, orange and purple such as berries, sweet potatoes and red peppers.

- * Eat plenty of seeds such as pumpkin and sunflower as snacks, in salads, on cereal etc.
- * Include plenty of vitamin C-rich foods in your diet - peppers, broccoli, peas, cabbage, lemons, oranges, strawberries.
- * Don't smoke, minimise alcohol, tea, coffee, sugar, dairy produce
- * On a daily basis supplement a high-strength multivitamin/mineral, 2 grams of Vitamin C 1000mg and an Immune complex (see Prevention box for key ingredients). All prevention levels given can be tripled when fighting a specific infection.

PREVENTION

Vitamin C

Vitamin C is the backbone of any immune boosting programme. It is strongly antiviral, as well as being anti-bacterial, and has proved successful against every virus tested so far, from HIV to the common cold. In addition it increases the vital soldiers in the immune army such as B and T lymphocytes, and interferon and helps cells gobble up bacteria and other 'rubbish' generated when you are under attack. In a review of research studies using 1 to 6 grams of vitamin C daily, Drs Hemila and Herman found consistent evidence of shorter colds with less symptoms.

Although an ideal daily intake of vitamin C is between 1,000 and 3,000 mg, for anyone fighting an infection or immune-related disease, much larger amounts, up to 20,000mg a day, may be taken on a short-term basis. When taking large amounts always take it with a lot of fluid and decrease the intake gradually when the infection has passed. If you take too much vitamin C you'll get loose bowels which is an indication to reduce the dose.

Supplement 1,000 to 3,000mg for daily prevention.

Zinc

Deficiency causes shrinking of the thymus, (the master gland of the immune system), possibly due to the fact that it is needed for normal release of vitamin A from the liver, which is needed for normal thymus

activity. It is also needed to produce enzymes needed for the elimination of routinely produced cancer cells (not for the large amounts once cancer is established). The hormone thymulin, which is necessary for T cell maturation, is also zinc dependent. The mineral zinc, in doses of 100mg a day, has also proved to be anti-viral and is available in lozenges for coughs and colds. This level is for short-term use only.

Supplement 6 to 9mg for daily prevention.

Cat's Claw

Uncaria tomentosa or cat's claw (it's thorn is shaped like the claw of a cat) is a woody vine that can wind it's way over 100 feet up through the trees in it's attempt to reach light in the Peruvian rain forests. The native Indians have long used its bark to treat cancer, joint problems and many other diseases. Components of cat's claw have been shown to increase the ability of white blood cells to carry out phagocytosis, i.e. to engulf, digest and so destroy an invading germ. It has also been shown to contain other chemicals which reduce inflammation. It is potentially a super-plant with immune-stimulating, antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, anti-tumour and antimicrobial properties.

Echinacea

This root of the plant Echinacea purpurea is probably the most widely used immune-boosting herb. It possesses interferon-like properties and is an effective anti-viral agent against flu and herpes . It contains special kinds of polysaccharides, such as inulin, which increase macrophage production. These have been shown to destroy cancer cells in the test tube and fight off the undesirable yeast *Candida albicans*. But Echinacea isn't just something to take when you've got an infection. One study on a group of healthy men, found that after five days of taking 30 drops of Echinacea extract, three times a day their white blood cells had doubled their 'phagocytic' power.

Supplement 60 to 100mg of a standardised extract for daily prevention.

Berry extracts & Anthocyanidins

Berries are extremely good for the immune system as they contain high levels of antioxidants including anthocyanidins. But elderberries have an extra special property

In a double-blind controlled trial elderberry extract produced significant improvement in symptoms - fever, cough, muscle pain - in 20 per cent of patients within 24 hours, and in a further 73 per cent of patients within 48 hours. After three days 90 per cent had achieved complete relief of symptoms compared to those on the placebo who took at least 6 days to recover . Blue-red berries are especially rich in immune-boosting anthocyanidins and other nutrients.

Supplement 40 to 60mg of a standardised extract for daily prevention

If you are fighting an infection here are other key natural remedies to add, depending on the nature of infections.

Key:

[V] are anti-viral e.g. colds and flu

[B] are anti-bacterial e.g. most sore throats, sinus, stomach and lung infection

[P] are anti-parasite e.g. some holiday bugs in exotic places

Aloe vera has immune-boosting, anti-viral and antiseptic properties, probably due to its high concentration of mucopolysaccharides. It's a good all-round tonic, as well as a booster during any infection.

[V] [B]

Antioxidants are substances that detoxify 'free radicals'. These include vitamins A,C,E, beta-carotene, zinc, selenium and many other non-essential substances from silymarin (milk thistle), pycnogenol, lipoic acid, bioflavonoids and bilberry extract.

[V] [B]

Astragalus is a Chinese herb renowned for all-round boosting immunity, high in beneficial mucopolysaccharides.

[V] [B]

Beta-carotene is the vegetable source of pre-vitamin A and an antioxidant in its own right. It also has the advantage of being non-toxic, although it is prone to oxygen damage and is often unstable in supplements. Red, orange, yellow foods and fresh vegetables are the best sources so eat carrots or watermelon, or their juice.

[V] [B]

Bee pollen is a natural antibiotic. It's probably best as a general tonic. Quality varies considerably as does contamination with lead - unfortunately, bees are polluted too. So pick your source carefully and watch out for very cheap supplies. You may get what you pay for. Be careful if you're pollen sensitive or allergic to bee stings.

[V] [B]

Elderberry has been shown to prevent viruses from invading cells, a necessary step for them to multiply and infect the victim. In a double-blind controlled trial elderberry extract produced significant improvement in symptoms - fever, cough, muscle pain - in 20 per cent of patients within 24 hours, and a further 73 per cent of patients within 48 hours. After three days 90 per cent had achieved complete relief of symptoms compared to those on the placebo who took at least 6 days to recover. If you've got a cold try a dessertspoon of elderberry extract three times a day.

[V]

Garlic contains allicin which is anti-viral, antifungal and anti-bacterial. Rich in sulphur-containing amino acids, it also acts as an antioxidant. It's undoubtedly an important ally in fighting infections, and garlic eaters have the lowest incidence of cancer. Consider a clove or capsule equivalent daily.

[B]

Ginger is particularly good for sore throats and stomach upsets. Put six slices of fresh ginger in a thermos with a stick of cinnamon and boiling water. Five minutes later you have a delicious, soothing tea. You can add a little lemon and honey too.

[B]

Grapefruit Seed Extract, also called Citricidal, is a powerful antibiotic, antifungal and anti-viral agent. The great advantage, however, is that it doesn't adversely effect beneficial gut bacteria. It comes in drops and can be swallowed, gargled with or used as nose drops or ear drops, depending on the site of infection.

[V] [B] [P]

Lysine is an amino acid that helps get rid off the herpes virus. During an infection its best to limit arginine-rich foods such as beans, lentils, nuts and chocolate.

[V]

Myrrh both boost immune cell count and is anti-bacterial and mildly anti-viral. Traditionally it has been used for mouth ulcers, gingivitis, laryngitis, pharyngitis and respiratory complaints. So it's good for sore throats and may also help with colds and flu.

[V] [B]

Mushrooms such as shiitake, maiitake, reishi or ganoderma, traditionally believed by Chinese Taoist to confer 'immortality', have all been shown to contain immune-boosting polysaccharides. You'll find them added to some immune-boosting supplements and tonics, or buy shiitake fresh or dried in supermarkets or health food stores.

[V] [B]

Olive Leaf has powerful anti-bacterial properties and has been shown to help a wide variety of respiratory diseases (tonsillitis, pharyngitis, pneumonia, bronchitis) as well as dental problems, viral & bacterial skin infections including herpes, gastric ulcer & Helicobacter pylori infection. It also has anti-fungal properties and is often used to treat candida infection.

Study into the use of olive leaf tincture in 3 HIV patients has demonstrated that it can boost general immunity, resulting in significant increases in increase in T4 cell count(one of 345%).

[V] [B] [P]

Probiotics as opposed to antibiotics, are beneficial bacteria that promote health and available in capsule or powder form. They are best used to restore balance in the digestive tract, for example, during a stomach bug. It's best to supplement extra during a bacterial infection and after any course of antibiotics.

[B] [P]

St John's Wort (hypericum) is particularly good for anything that penetrates the skin, such as a wound or skin infection. It's a good general tonic for the immune system.

[B] [P]

Tea Tree Oil is an Australian remedy with antiseptic and antifungal properties. Great for rubbing on the chest or gargling (diluted), in the bath, or steam inhaling and also helps keep mosquitoes away.

[B] [P]