

## **AVOIDING THE FLU (and Other Bugs)**

by Judith Boyce, MD

Talk of an impending flu pandemic has many people feeling as though they are defenceless against such a threat. Experts are suggesting that the best defence is a good offence; that is, a strong immune system and a fighting spirit! Influenza vaccinations, although helpful, do not provide blanket protection from contracting the flu, and they do not protect against viral upper respiratory tract infections (common colds) —which are much more common. And some folks are unable or choose not to take the flu shot. Whether or not you choose to have a flu vaccination, here are some simple immune-boosting precautions you can take to protect yourself from or lessen symptoms of the flu or common cold.

### **Try the following:**

- **Avoid sick people if at all possible.** Avoid shaking hands with them, if you must be in contact.
- **Wash your hands frequently,** especially if you are out in public places, and as soon as you arrive at work or home. Teach your kids the same!
- **Use hot water and soap.** Carry alcohol towelettes or gel with you if you won't have access to a sink.
- **Keep your hands away from your face** - especially your eyes and nose. These are easy entry points for viruses.
- **Eat a healthy diet with lots of fruits and vegetables,** berries, and green tea for natural antioxidants to support your virus-fighting immune system.
- **Take a daily multivitamin with antioxidants.**
- **Limit sugar.** Sugar decreases the function of your immune system almost immediately. It is especially important to avoid sugar if you feel a cold or flu coming on.
- **Eat garlic.** Raw garlic is best. Try at least two cloves a day, chopped up in soups or stir-fries. It's a natural antiviral!
- **Take astragalus.** This immune-enhancing herb can help to build up resistance to flu and the common cold. Follow package instructions.

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- **Drink lots of water and other sugar-free fluids.** Staying hydrated keeps nasal passages moist, making them effective defenders against viruses.
- **Get regular exercise.** Exercise increases circulation and helps your immune system be more efficient in seeking out and acting on viruses and other diseases. Try a daily walk.
- **Get enough rest.** Lack of sleep results in fatigue and a weakened immune system. It will be harder for you to fight the flu or cold viruses.
- **Don't let stress get out of hand.** If stress becomes overwhelming, your body will be less able to fight off the flu and other illnesses. It has been estimated that up to 90% of illness is stress related. Find a relaxing activity and do at least 15 minutes twice a day. Try deep, abdominal breathing.

**If you begin to feel a cold or the flu coming on:**

- **Stay home and rest.** You will recover more quickly and will avoid passing it on to others.
- **Take echinacea.** This herb will be most effective if you use it at the first sign of a cold or flu, and should not be used for more than 10 days. Follow package instructions.
- **Influenza is serious** - it is not just a bad cold. Aching, chills, and fever can lead to pneumonia if not treated. See your doctor if you have these symptoms.

**Stein Medical Clinic wishes you a healthy winter.**