Leyla Weighs In: Five ways to stay healthy during cold and flu season



Besides regular hand washing, which can reduce your chances of getting the flu by 50 percent according to the CDC, here are some other things you can do to keep your immune system optimal:

1) Take a probiotic, and eat probiotic foods like sauerkraut, kimchee and lactic acid fermented pickles. As much as 70 percent of the immune system is in the gut – the gut-associated lymphoid tissue (GALT). Keeping your microbiome healthy is the first order of business in maintaining healthy immunity. Eat prebiotic foods such as onions, leeks, garlic, asparagus, Jerusalem artichoke and dandelion greens regularly to feed those beneficial microbes. Indeed, good health begins in the gut.

2) Tame your sweet tooth. Sugar is likely the most addictive substance on the planet, so this can be tough. In laboratory experiments, sugar is found to suppress white blood cells – the soldiers of your immune system. Sugar is also an antinutrient, capable of causing deficiencies in B vitamins and magnesium. All good reasons to give it up entirely.

3) Get your Zzzzz's. Not getting enough shut-eye is another notorious immune system suppressor. If you regularly get less than six hours of sleep a night, you may be more prone to catching a cold this season. Resolve to get seven to eight hours of sleep every night because rest and repair are critical for an optimally functioning immune system. And a nice side effect to getting enough sleep is diminished food cravings.

4) Exercise, but don't overdo it. The benefits of exercise are indisputable for good health and cardiovascular tone. But *too much* exercise has its downside. Elite athletes and marathoners are more prone to colds and flu because all that training dampens immune response. Also, if you already have a cold, exercising when you shouldn't can prolong your rehab. When you're sick, you need rest, not a six mile run.

5) Last but not least, take some immune-enhancing supplements. Vitamin C, zinc and olive leaf extract are mainstays during cold and flu season. Take them with your meals for optimal absorption. But if you've already come down with the sniffles, try Viracid. You can buy any of these supplements from Dr. Hoffman's Fullscript dispensary.

To your health!

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