

Fighting the Common Cold with your Fork, Supplements, and Socks

Cooler weather is approaching and with that the increased likelihood of getting a cold. We all know that washing your hands, covering your mouth when you sneeze, and plenty of rest help ward off colds, but did you know that your *diet* can prevent you from getting colds?

Fork

Eating a well-balanced diet is important for a strong immune system. A balanced diet includes 5-7 servings of brightly colored fruits and vegetables, lean protein sources, whole grains and small amounts of heart-healthy monounsaturated fats.

Three key vitamins are beneficial to the immune system.

- *Vitamin A* increases the body's T cells.
Found in orange and green produce such as carrots, sweet potatoes, winter squash, spinach and broccoli.
- *Vitamin C* helps increase the number of white cells and antibodies.
Found in tomatoes, broccoli and citrus fruits.
- *Vitamin E* helps the body produce antibodies that aid in fighting and attacking foreign substances.
Found in nuts, seeds and oils.

Additional immune system supportive foods not listed previously include:

- *Probiotics* are cultures of the "good" bacteria that occur naturally in the GI tract of healthy human beings. These good guys compete with harmful bacteria in the GI tract.
Found in yogurt with live active cultures, kefir, tempeh and miso.
- *Garlic* has antibacterial and antiviral effects and provides the most benefit when eaten raw and in large amounts.
- *Mushrooms* have gained popularity as good for the immune system.
Varieties such as reishi, maitake and shiitake are particularly useful.

Drinking plenty of clean water and herbal teas are vitally important for keeping your immune system in tip-top shape.

Supplements

At the first sign of the cold or flu supplements can be helpful in reducing the severity and duration of their course. Of the many herbs touted as useful in treating colds and flues, Echinacea is the most well known. Like others in this category, Echinacea has been proven to stimulate immune system activity, and has antiviral and antibacterial properties. It can usually be found in capsule and tincture form.

Astragalus is another immune stimulating herb, well known in traditional Chinese Medicine, and becoming more popular in western botanical circles. It too has antiviral properties, and so is useful in treating upper respiratory tract infections. It

can be taken in capsule or tincture form.

If you're not game to consume raw garlic or eat very much of it, try aged garlic in supplement form. This can support your efforts to both prevent the onset of a cold or flu, as well as to provide support in your efforts to shorten the length and severity of the infection.

Socks

There are a number of other tools that you have at home to stop a cold or flu. In addition to rest and drinking plenty of fluids, try the warming sock treatment by soaking your feet in warm water for 10-15 minutes, and putting on a pair of thin cotton socks that you have run under cold water and wrung out well. On top of them put on a pair of dry, heavy wool socks and go to bed. Once the socks are dry, you can take them off and return to a pleasant sleep. Sounds crazy, but there is ample evidence supporting its use relating to stimulation of the immune system.

Don't wait to prevent colds and flues! Get in the habit of eating a healthy diet starting today. Keep a couple of cold and flu treatments in stock: extra vitamin C, Echinacea, Astragalus and two pairs of socks. The best defense during the cold and flu season is a good offense!

Marcia Prenguber, ND

Becky Overholt, RD