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# NATURAL PRACTITIONER™


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## Keeping the Immune System Strong

Patients turn to  
natural remedies and  
a healthy lifestyle

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# Keeping the Immune System Strong

**Patients turn to  
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a healthy lifestyle**

**By Melissa Kvidahl**

**W**ith the kids in school, adults heading indoors as the temperatures cool and the dreaded flu season upon us, thoughts quickly turn to immunity—how to maintain it, boost it and keep it working optimally. From managing diagnosed immune system disorders like rheumatoid arthritis and inflammatory bowel disease to simply ensuring the body won't surrender to every cold germ that crosses its path, immunity is at the forefront of many patients' minds. "Patients, in general, are seeking what we are all seeking. We are looking to live a peaceful and healthy life wherein we can be active and free to do what we wish in the absence of obstacles to health," said Dr. Shailinder Sodhi, president of Washington-based Ayush Herbs Inc. "Patients who are specifically seeking to naturally boost the immune system are actually seeking natural remedies for longevity and vitality. If they have a histo-

ry of chronic infections, they are seeking a way to remain disease-free as much as possible and they recognize that this is only possible with a healthy immune system."

But immune concerns are not limited to those with a chronic illness or a suppressed system. For most people, explained Dr. Milind Patil, medical advisor at Charak Pharma Pvt. Ltd. in India, even a typically strong immune system can wither in the face of various infections, especially viral infections of the respiratory tract—a common ailment in the winter months. In the case of even a healthy immune system being compromised, susceptibility to infections increases and normal, healthy life is affected. "Patients look to strengthen the defense mechanisms to reduce the chances of infections, stay healthy and enjoy a disease-free life," he said. "Even if they are hit by infections, the resulting disorder should have lesser intensity and severity, no recurrence and need minimal

medications."

And when it comes to natural immune-boosting therapies, most patients are looking for efficacy and safety. "They must work most of the time and be safe all of the time," explained Thomas G. Guilliams, PhD, vice president of scientific affairs at Ortho Molecular Products Inc., with locations in Illinois and Wisconsin. According to Dr. Guilliams, patients differ in their willingness to try new products; while some prefer to stick to well-known ingredients, others keep up with clinical trials and are willing to try new products. "After efficacy and safety, other factors such as convenience, taste and price always play into their willingness to use natural products," he added.

## **Risk Factors**

Before diving into ways to effectively boost immunity through natural interventions, it is critical to first understand the myriad of

risk factors facing even the healthiest of immune systems today. The first one that comes to mind for many experts is stress.

According to Dr. Sodhi, stress results in the hyperactivity of the adrenal gland and the release of cortisol into the bloodstream. “Cortisol is a stress hormone that promotes the fight or flight response in the body; therefore, the attention of the body is naturally shifted outward looking for predators,” he explained. “When this happens, the internal functions of the body like digestion, restoration and immune activity all become suppressed.” And because chronic stress has reached epidemic proportions in Western culture, he recommends yoga, Pranayama and breathing exercises, as well as meditation and recreational activities to restore relaxation. Hand in hand with stress is often a less than ideal night’s sleep. “We used to get nine hours of sleep, until about 30 years ago,” explained **Jacob Teitelbaum**, director of the Practitioner Alliance Network. “Now we’re down to 6.75 hours per night and it does a number on the immune system.”

Dr. Patil offered up a number of additional immune-suppressors affecting patients’ abilities to ward off illness, even if they’re clocking in enough sleep and warding off stress. First on his list is excessive sugar intake, which can reduce the ability of white blood cells to kill germs; even worse the immune-suppressing effect of sugar starts immediately after ingestion, he said. “When you have a can of soda, for example, that’s nine spoons of sugar,” agreed Dr. Teitelbaum. “It suppresses the immune system by 30 percent for three hours, so cutting out excess sugar is the number one way to support immunity.”

Next, Dr. Patil explained, excessive alcohol intake can put healthy immunity at risk, because alcohol ingestion deprives the body of protective nutrients. “High doses of alcohol suppress the availability of the white blood cells to multiply, and it inhibits the action of natural killer cells,” he said. “Damage to the immune system increases in proportion to the quantity of alcohol consumed.” His easy gauge? If it’s enough to cause intoxication, it’s enough to suppress immunity.

Processed foods that overwhelm many Western diets are also putting immune systems on the chopping block nationwide. According to Dr. Patil, foods that contain synthetic colors, dyes, sweeteners, flavors and texturizers can decrease immunity and

increase risk for a body’s susceptibility to cold and flu viruses. “Food processing has shot the digestive process to hell,” agreed Dr. Teitelbaum. “About 40 years ago, food processors learned that if they destroy enzymes in the food, it will have a longer shelf life. The problem is that the enzymes in foods also help digest the food properly. This means that people are ingesting only partially digested foods, and it’s causing gut problems because as the partially digested food is entering the bloodstream, the immune system deals with them like they’re exterior invaders. And it’s basically overwhelming the immune system.”

Indeed, the standard American diet (SAD) is to blame for at least some patients’ immune issues. “This type of diet is high in carbohydrates that break down into sugars, and it is low in fresh plant-based food,” explained Dr. Sodhi. “This type of diet provides imbalanced proportions of carbs, proteins and fats, causing a lot of problems that are beyond immunosuppression.”

Beyond typical issues like high sugar, poor diet and stress, are some red flags that are a bit less common but still worth looking into if a patient seems to be suffering from a damaged immune system. First up is mold, said Dr. Sodhi. “Mold in the house becomes spores that are aerosolized,” he said. “Upon inhaling them, the immune system is activated. Living in a moldy environment can cause chronic low-grade activation of the immune system that can weaken the system to other threats over time.” And according to Bryan See, regional product manager at New Jersey-based Carotech, Inc., depression, drug abuse and medical treatments like radio or chemotherapy can also take a toll on immunity.

So with all these stressors, patients are looking to make a change. For See, they tend to fall into one of two categories when it comes to their openness in natural approaches to boosting immunity: what he calls the do-it-yourself (DIY) type and the supplement type. “The DIY type prefers getting immune health boosters through freshly prepared foods,” he explained, “while the supplement type will seek to boost immune health through the use of supplement products.”

## Diet and Exercise

One way, of course, to stock up on nutrients beneficial to immune health is

through diet. “Diet goes a long way in terms of supporting immune functions. Our bodies are chemical factories that make everything we need to remain healthy or restore health,” said Dr. Sodhi. “As fuel, fresh organic food provides beneficial macronutrients like proteins, fats and carbs as well as micronutrients like vitamins, minerals and fiber.” In addition to this, he added, fresh vegetables and fruits also provide medicinal compounds (bioflavonoids, saponins, alkaloids, polysaccharides, etc.) that can support immunity. “Food can function as medicine, and minimize the need for supplementation in a healthy individual,” he said.

See advises that patients improve their immunity by eating lots of fresh, in-season produce, especially fruits and vegetables that have high antioxidant and fiber counts like avocado, berries, currants, mushroom, kale and broccoli.

“The role between diet and immunity is so clearly established,” agreed Barry W. Ritz, PhD, vice president of scientific and regulatory affairs at Atrium Innovations Inc. (Montreal, QC, Canada), maker of Pure Encapsulations supplements, and visiting assistant research professor in nutrition at Drexel University. “It has been well demonstrated that basically any nutritional insufficiency will result in a measurable decrease in immune function and that, when that insufficiency is addressed, immune function will return.

## Lifestyle Tips

Beyond a healthy diet, consistent exercise and mindful supplementation, there is a bounty of other lifestyle changes that can benefit immunity.

- **Maintain good hygiene.** Wash hands often, and keep hands away from the face, said See.

- **Say “no” to smoking.** It’s a strain on the immune system, and the body as a whole, said Dr. Patil.

- **Get some shut eye.** Sleep seven to eight hours per night to maintain the proper circadian lifestyle, explained Dr. Guilliams. With less than seven hours of sleep—or sleeping in opposition to traditional light/dark cycles—immune cell function is tremendously hindered.

- **Be pro-digestion.** Chewing food carefully and staying hydrated will help digestion, said Dr. Teitelbaum, which helps immunity.



## Keeping the Immune System Strong

“In my own research, I’ve also looked at the role of body weight in immune function,” he continued, adding that it seems logical that it takes energy—or some weight—to combat illness. “This is why being underweight is a risk factor in terms of maintaining an effective immune response. But some studies also show that being overweight or obese can impair immune response.” In light of these, Dr. Ritz explained, maintaining a healthy body weight is an important consideration in maintaining an effective immune system, and for the elderly, being on the upper end of normal body weight or even slightly overweight might be protective, as opposed to the risks associated with being underweight or even frail.

The much-prescribed notion of combining a healthy diet with exercise for general health is echoed among experts in the immune arena—especially because it combats stress, which is a top immune-buster. “Add exercise into your routine if you have a high-stress job,” advised See. “Other than releasing tension, exercise helps the heart work harder, pumping blood more rapidly, which will improve circulation, sending more antibodies and white blood cells throughout the body to detect and capture harmful bacteria or viruses.” Indeed, according to Dr. Reza Kamarei, chief scientific advisor at New Jersey-based America’s Finest, Inc. (AFI), the International Society of Exercise and Immunology dictates that acute and chronic exercise can alter the number and function of the immune system’s circulating cells. “The mechanism of how exercise boosts the immune system is not clear but it is possible, due to increased circulation of blood, white blood cells reach the infection site faster and at earlier stages,” he advised. “Rise in body temperature may also be effective in preventing bacterial growth.” And if you ask David Scrimgeour, licensed acupuncturist and owner of Six Persimmons in Colorado, exercise also calms the nervous system by increasing endorphins and other neuro-hormones and neurotransmitters, and helps the body achieve balance by optimizing all functions, including the

immune system.

Dr. Sodhi agreed that exercise is great for immune function, but warned that it is a “double-edged sword.” According to Dr. Sodhi, excessive or vigorous exercise can actually suppress immunity due to an induction of too much cortisol. “This can make the individual vulnerable to getting sick up to one week after exercise,” he said. But when done in moderation, he explained, exercise can promote healthy bowel function, which can eliminate toxins.

Dr. Guillems agreed that too much exercise can increase risk for infection.

**“Add exercise into your routine if you have a high-stress job. Other than releasing tension, exercise helps the heart work harder, pumping blood more rapidly, which will improve circulation, sending more antibodies and white blood cells throughout the body to detect and capture harmful bacteria or viruses.”**

“The tipping point (between immune system improvement and depletion has much to do with a person’s ability to quench oxygen free radicals and limit exercise-induced cortisol production,” he said. “Patients with autoimmune conditions and/or weak immune systems should be encouraged to engage in regular moderate exercise (aerobic and resistance), but should avoid strenuous or extended exercise programs.” Dr. Guillems’ newest

book, *Supporting Immune Function: A Lifestyle and Nutrient Approach* is the latest in his Principles and Protocols for Health Care Professionals line of resources. The book outlines the basic principles of immunology for today’s practicing clinician, as well lifestyle, nutritional and dietary supplement approaches to building and maintaining a healthy immune system.

Indeed, as in the case of body weight, Dr. Ritz maintained there is a “sweet spot” when it comes to exercise and immune health. “Intense exercise or over-exercising can actually be associated with an impaired immune response,” he said. “Participation in extreme athletic events, like marathons, has been suggested to contribute to an increase in the likelihood of something like a respiratory tract infection. This is an area we’ve been exploring in our own research when considering how nutritional supplements might be applied to maintaining immune response in healthy populations.”

### Supplement Solutions

Dr. Guillems explained that building immune strength takes the shape of two phases. The first phase consists of building a foundation of eating a healthy diet, and using a multivitamin/multimineral to fill in the gaps. “The second phase is the use of dietary supplements as immunomodulating agents,” he said. “Herbal remedies (echinacea, andrographis, elderberry, etc.), beta-glucans from yeast or mushrooms, colostrum and lactoferrin, probiotics, and omega-3 fatty acids are just some of the categories of natural immunomodulating agents currently in use as dietary supplements.” Ortho Molecular Products recently launched WholeMune, which utilizes the ingredient Wellmune WGP for immune health.

For Dr. Teitelbaum, zinc is the most important nutrient for immune function because chronic infections and inflammation cause a depletion of zinc. Pair it together with vitamin A (“Those two aren’t sexy, they’re not expensive, but they’re easy and they’re effective,” he said), and it’s his best recommendation for an immune-friendly foundation.

Dr. Sodhi recommended herbs like amla, ashwagandha, guduchi, neem, bibhitaki and daruhaldi. “They’re agents of nature’s pharmacy that can be used to

**(Continued on page 31)**

far-reaching. Clinical outcomes for addiction recovery are significantly improved when the family is involved and unified against a common threat.”

“Both at-home and group support systems are a vital part of addiction recovery,” said Griffin. “The struggles an addict faces in early recovery can be too much to bear on their own, and surrounding that person with others who are experiencing or have experienced similar issues can be a powerful tool for encouragement.”



Florida-based Puricorp, which developed a line of non-pharmaceutical products, including Declinol, as alternatives to prescription drugs such as methadone, suboxone, buprenorphine, naltrexone and others, also offers “at-home” programs that include tele-health counseling with Joint-Commission-certified counselors, both in individual and group settings. According to

the company, the combination of at-home physiological and behavioral help is proving to be exceptionally powerful and convenient for its clients.

## Conclusion

There are many options for addiction treatment and continued support for recovery with a holistic approach to healing their advancing popularity. These treatment programs, including nutrient supplementation and full recovery programs, should not be a one-size-fits-all approach and should instead address the physical, mental and spiritual needs of each individual.

“People attending a holistic substance abuse treatment program learn that drugs and alcohol are not the problem—they are only a symptom of the problem,” concluded Dr. Drake. “When the substances are removed, a person must learn other healthy ways to deal with life’s issues and problems. Holistic treatment looks at all aspects of life, which have been affected by the disease. It’s only when a person is allowed and encouraged to address all of the damage the disease has caused and can hope for recovery.” 🩺



**(Continued from page 22)**

promote natural immunity,” he said. “Herbals have been allies of humans for many milleniums; therefore, their role as medicine has evolved with humans. This makes them relatively much safer compared to any pharmaceuticals I know.” An assortment of these herbs are available from Ayush Herbs.

Scrimgeour points to toning and strengthening herbs used in Chinese medicine as another immune support option. Six Persimmons Apothecary offers Supreme Immune Tonic, which offers a combination of herbs in high concentrations, specifically, astragalus at a concentration of 50:1. “Based on modern research, this not only gives it an immune

enhancing effect, but also an immune modulating and anti-aging effect as well,” Scrimgeour said. The company also offers a children’s version with an appropriate dosage and in an alcohol-free liquid delivery, called Kid’s Immune Tonic. “This one was designed to keep kids healthy, especially during the school season,” he added. “Many parents have reported that their kids get sick a whole lot less when they take this consistently.”

Other products available include Immunity Health from AFI (America’s Finest, Inc.), which contains bioactive ingredients like selenium, saberry, resveratrol, curcumin and more. On the ingredient side is Tocomin, a full spectrum palm tocotrienol complex from Carotech for the use in finished products.

“There are so many things that affect immunity, but it doesn’t mean people should be afraid of their environment,” concluded Dr. Teitelbaum. “We have a bad habit in medicine these days, whether it’s standard or holistic, telling people to be afraid. Although we have a lot of challenges, it is not healthy to scare people all the time, and it will exhaust the immune system. Instead, focus on giving the tools they need to succeed given the current environment.” 🩺

## References:

1 Natural Standard [www.naturalmedicines.therapeuticresearch.com](http://www.naturalmedicines.therapeuticresearch.com).

■ Alcohol is the most widely used drug in America and the third leading cause of death.

■ More than 60 percent of admissions to emergency rooms and more than 50 percent of all traffic accidents involve drug or alcohol use.

■ Acupuncture is considered an effective treatment for many common addictions.

■ A holistic approach to treating addiction involves addressing the person’s physical, mental and spiritual well-being.

Healthy Take Always

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- Designs for Health, (800) 847-8302, [www.designsforhealth.com](http://www.designsforhealth.com)
- Puricorp, (800) 385-5004, [www.puricorp.com](http://www.puricorp.com)

- Immunity is at the forefront of many patients’ minds.
- Immune concerns are not limited to those with a chronic illness or a suppressed system.
- When it comes to natural immune-boosting therapies, most patients are looking for efficacy and safety.
- It’s important to identify the risk factors facing immune systems today.

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## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- America’s Finest, Inc., (800) 350-3305, [www.afisupplements.com](http://www.afisupplements.com)
- Ayush Herbs Inc., (800) 925-1371, [www.ayush.com](http://www.ayush.com)
- Carotech, Inc., (732) 906-1901 [www.carotech.net](http://www.carotech.net)
- Charak Pharma Pvt. Ltd., (888) 802-0213, [www.charak.com](http://www.charak.com)
- Ortho Molecular Products Inc., (800) 332-2351, [www.orthomolecularproducts.com](http://www.orthomolecularproducts.com)
- Pure Encapsulations, (800) 753-2277, [www.pureencapsulations.com](http://www.pureencapsulations.com)
- Six Persimmons Apothecary, (303) 583-0719, [www.sixpersimmons.com](http://www.sixpersimmons.com)