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Beware of High-Dose Flu Vaccine: Top Doctor

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By Charlotte Libov

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Older people are being urged this year to get a high-dose version of the flu shot. However, renowned holistic doctor Jacob Teitelbaum, M.D., warns that seniors should be cautious about getting this relatively new and stronger version of the flu vaccine.

"I'm telling my patients not to be guinea pigs for the drug companies," he tells Newsmax Health.

The flu vaccine, even in high-dose formulations, has been shown to be only 50 percent effective or less, Dr. Teitelbaum notes.

"Taking zinc and vitamin D are better ways to boost your immune system and protect yourself against the flu," he says.

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The manufacturer of the high-dose flu vaccine, Sanofi Pasteur, is hoping to get the government to recommend it for older Americans. The Food and Drug Administration approved the high-dose vaccine in 2009, but it hasn't been very popular. Only one in three people over 65 received the higher-dose vaccine, government statistics show.

The CDC is seeking a more effective flu vaccine for seniors in view of the disappointing performance of last year's version. An analysis showed that in those 65 years and older, the vaccine resulted in only 9 percent fewer flu-related doctor's visits among those who got the shot.

The effectiveness of the vaccine depends on a person's immune response, and the immune system weakens as people age. The theory is that a high-dose vaccine will engender a stronger immune response, which could translate into better flu protection.

The high-dose vaccine contains four times the amount of antigens — substances that stimulate the body's immune system to fight the flu. Dr. Teitelbaum is concerned that such a potent dose could overstimulate the immune system and result in more side effects.

"The risks remain unknown until the vaccine is in large-scale use," he says.

Dr. Teitelbaum, author of the bestselling book "Real Cause, Real Cure," continues to recommend the regular-dose flu vaccine. He believes older patients should wait at least one more flu season before considering the higher-dosage version.

"You want to wait until the vaccine is in broader use, so there is time to see what side effects occur," he advises.

In the meantime, he says, "It's far better to increase your body's immune system's own effectiveness with sleep and nutritional support, which will give much greater benefits while being much safer and lower cost."

To bolster the immune system and prevent flu, Dr. Teitelbaum has the following recommendations whether you get the vaccine or not:

- Take 15-20 milligrams of zinc, either as part of a multivitamin or as a supplement. "Zinc is the overlooked link in the body's immune response. As people age, they eat less protein, and protein contains zinc. Research shows that if people age 65 and over took zinc supplements, this would boost the effectiveness of vaccines, and also help boost the immune system in general to prevent getting the flu in the first place," he says.
- Take a minimum of 800-1,000 international units of vitamin D daily, and also take walks in the sunshine whenever possible, taking care not to get sunburned.
- Get enough sleep. "Research shows that, as we age, we tend to get less sleep, and sleep is necessary for the body's strong immune response," he says. If you have trouble sleeping, Dr. Teitelbaum recommends trying one-half milligram of melatonin before bed. "The scent of lavender is also known to induce sleepiness. Put a bit of lavender on your pillow or lavender oil on your lips. If you don't like the scent, you can get lavender in pill form as well," he says.

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