



PREVENTING WINTER ILLNESS

About 40% of time off work and 30% of school absences are caused by colds. Preventing winter illness will not only make you feel better, but will increase productivity in the economy as well as children's school attendance.

You can help prevent winter illness by eating properly and following a healthy lifestyle. Diet can help you correct nutritional deficiencies and supplement natural substances that are lacking.

Healthy lifestyle choices

One of the sensible lifestyle choices is to go to bed early and be asleep before 10.30pm. Getting enough sleep helps your body to produce melatonin, an antioxidant and replenishing molecule. Regular exercise also helps to increase the number of killer cells in your immune system, cells that combat cancer and viruses.

Lowering stress also helps to promote the immune system, making you less vulnerable to illnesses in general. To manage your stress, you need to get enough sleep and regular exercise. It also helps to think about the way you think – do you tend to be negative? A positive frame of mind helps to combat stress.

Ideally, you should avoid potentially harmful ingredients in your diet, for instance too much coffee, sugar and alcohol. For some people, dairy and gluten are sources of health problems. Make sure you eat lots of vegetables, some fruit and enough protein. The fruit and vegetables help ensure that you ingest the vitamins you need to help your body prevent winter ills.

Vitamins against illness

The major nutrients needed to keep you healthy in winter are Vitamin C, Vitamin D, iron, zinc, selenium and magnesium.

Vitamin C acts as an antioxidant and protects other antioxidant agents in the body, including Vitamin A, Vitamin E and essential fatty acids such as Omega 3. Vitamin C also helps your body absorb iron, as well as assist with wound healing, bone and collagen formation, thyroid hormone balance and even provides protection against cancer. On top of this, Vitamin C is an acute antihistamine.

If you take a dose of 200-2000mg daily, it can give you protection against common colds or reduce its severity once you have it. Overall, Vitamin C is helpful to ward off not only common colds, but also flu, hay fever, asthma, shingles, glandular fever, bacterial infections and viral pneumonia.

Vitamin D deficiency

Vitamin D deficiency has reached epidemic proportions worldwide. Some groups run a higher risk of deficiency, including women, the elderly, overweight people, smokers and people with darker skin. Illness, drugs or poor bowel absorption are also factors contributing to deficiency. Most Vitamin D comes from the sun. In New Zealand, people on the South Island are more at risk because they get less intense sunshine.

The main role Vitamin D plays in respiratory illness is that lung function improves when the deficiency is addressed. Vitamin D is associated with improved peak flow in asthmatics. It prevents or at least reduces Influenza A, the most predominant form of flu in winter and one that can cause pandemics. In addition, it acts against pneumococcal infection (a common cause of pneumonia), A streptococcal infection (the cause of strep throat) and tuberculosis.

Mighty minerals

Taking zinc supplements for 5 months or more has been found to reduce school absences and the need for antibiotics, according to one study. Through its direct anti-viral action, zinc reduces colds, pneumonia and bronchiolitis, while also acting as an antihistamine.

The most common nutrient deficiency in the world is lack of iron, which affects a third to a half of everyone on earth. Studies show that giving anaemic children iron supplements reduces the incidence of upper respiratory infections as well as how long people take to recover from such illnesses. Before you take an iron supplement, it's recommended you first get your blood tested, as having too much iron can also cause health problems.

Magnesium also acts as an antihistamine. It also relieves respiratory illnesses such as asthma by relaxing the airways.

Selenium shortages have been associated with diminished immunity as well as incidence of allergies, asthma, heart disease and cancer. This is an essential trace element naturally found in soil. However, in New Zealand the soil tends to have too little selenium.

Natural supplements

The Echinacea Purpura flower effectively combats the common cold, reducing its incidence and shortening its duration where it does take hold. You can use echinacea as soon as you notice a viral infection starting, or even before the time as a preventative measure. Echinacea may also help with strep throat or bacterial sinusitis. If you are pregnant or breast feeding, echinacea is not recommended. Cancer patients are also cautioned against using echinacea.

The Chinese have been using astragalus for at least 2000 years. Astragalus acts against many viruses, specifically reducing cold and flu. If you have fever or cancer you should avoid using astragalus.

The strongest ingredient in olive leaf extracts is oleuropein. This natural substance is effective against many bacteria, including salmonella, E.Coli and H.Pylori. As far as respiratory illnesses go, oleuropein is known to prevent Influenza A and para-influenza, as well as two common causes of colds, myxovirus and rhinovirus.

Oleuropein counteracts herpes simplex viruses types I and II, Staph Aureus and methicillin-resistant Staph Aureus (MRSA). According to some studies, it even works against the Aids virus.

You can take olive leaf extract at the beginning of an infection to limit its effect. It has not yet been conclusively tested in terms of safety for pregnant or lactating mothers.

The bovine colostrum that cows produce just after birth has been a popular health supplement for thousands of years. Colostrum is rich in nutrients, antibodies, vitamins, minerals and growth factors.

In winter, it may help counteract viruses such as influenza and rota by protecting respiratory and gut membranes against infection.

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