



OPINION COLUMN

Natural medicines good defence for flu symptoms

Melissa Carr, 24 hours

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We face it every year. School season starts and shortly after, so too does cold and flu season.

It might seem inevitable that you are going to get sick when your family member returns home with a runny nose and a cough, but it is possible to defend against the seemingly unavoidable cold.

The way to a healthy immune system is similar to the path to good general health: nutritious food, restful sleep, regular exercise and positive attitude.

Whole natural foods are the foundation of a healthy diet. Colourful fruits and vegetables are rich in immune-boosting vitamins and minerals. One of these powerhouses for the immune system is the increasingly popular veggie, kale. High in vitamin C and K, carotenes, B vitamins, folate, calcium, iron, manganese, magnesium, and zinc, it is no wonder it's good for you.

If you're not so fond of kale, then how about mushrooms? Shiitake mushrooms are particularly great defenders of good health. They

contain a component called lentinan, a compound that seems to trigger the production of the anti-viral and antibacterial constituent interferon. No longer reserved for just the Chinese emperor, it remains a symbol of longevity in Asia and elsewhere.

With busy schedules and over-stimulated brains, sufficient restful sleep may seem hard to achieve. But do not let its importance be underestimated. Our number of T-cells — cells that help us fight off tiny invaders — decrease when we’re sleep-deprived. We also become weaker at fighting off a cold or flu once it has taken hold. One of our defences is a fever and we get a better fever response while we sleep.

While we may not feel like exercising when we’re sick, creating a regular routine for exercise can help us avoid succumbing in the first place. Some theories of how this might work include that it can help flush out bacteria from the lungs, increase blood circulation to help our white blood cells detect illnesses more quickly, trigger a temporary rise in body temperature that might prevent bacterial growth and slow the release of stress hormones.

A positive attitude might not seem easily linked to a healthy immune system, but there is a whole field of study called psychoneuroimmunology, or PNI, that investigates the connection between the mind, the nervous system and the immune system.

Technically we are still short of a cure for the common cold, but it is possible to limit their frequency and severity, and natural medicine offers many solutions.

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