

The message that doctors such as myself have been trumpeting for some time has never had the urgency of being followed as now. The swine flu catches, particularly U.S citizens, at a time when people have not paid attention to maintaining a healthy immune system. Your internal immune system is similar in its defense of your internal environment as our military complex is at protecting our country from outside invaders. A healthy immune system is able to kill viruses, bacteria and fungi that we breathe in and are otherwise exposed to on a regular basis. Conventional medical doctors, being trained mostly by drug companies, have not given patients information on keeping a healthy immune system. Now with this crisis, it puts you dependent on ineffective drugs.

When viral epidemics like the current one hit, there is always a pattern of death and survival. Four people can be exposed to the same virus. One will have no symptoms, one will have mild symptoms but recover quickly, another will have more severe symptoms and take longer to recover, and another will die. The difference is not due to the virus but the strength of the immune system in each person. We know certain things that will harm or strengthen the immune system. By avoiding things that weaken the immune system and taking advantage of things that strengthen the immune system, you can fortify your body to have the best chance for survival. Most people survive swine flu with no intervention. So obviously, an intact human immune system is capable of defeating the virus.

The most vulnerable groups to viral infection are the very young and the very old. In the young, the immune system is immature; in the elderly immune function is going downhill. This is primarily due to reduced levels of hormones that start to drop around age 30. Key among these for immune system function is thyroid hormone. Thyroid hormones control the number of immune cells present and their potency at killing germs. Go to my website <www.drfit.com> and evaluate yourself for hypothyroidism. If you have several symptoms, see your doctor for a blood test. This should include: TSH, free T3, free T4, reverse T3, and the thyroid antibodies: thyroid peroxidase and thyroglobulin antibody. Even if all these tests are normal, you may still have a thyroid imbalance.

Yeast/fungal overload is another common cause of immune compromise. The amount of yeast that resides in the body increases with age, thyroid decline and the amount of sugar and grains in the diet. Yeasts produce toxins that poison immune system cells. The more yeast you have, the weaker your immune system will be. You can have yeast overgrowth without having an infection that would be noted by you or your doctor. Do an evaluation for yeast overgrowth at my website <www.drfit.com>.

You will always have a population of yeast in the body, but you don't want an imbalance. Eliminating sugar and grains from your diet will stop you from facilitating yeast overgrowth. Yeast will over grow if you are hypothyroid. Antibiotics facilitate yeast overgrowth. Only take prescription antibiotics if absolutely necessary. Another exposure to antibiotics comes from eating animals given antibiotics. Steroid medications reduce immune system function. These are often prescribed long-term for asthma and other conditions that are usually caused by undiagnosed yeast overgrowth. The book "The Yeast Connection and the Woman" by William Crook, M.D. and Carolyn Dean, M.D. N.D. will outline a protocol to get rid of asthma and other yeast related problems without the use of immune suppressing medications. Stronger medications such as methotrexate, Remicade and Enbrel are strong immune system suppressants. These medications allow cancer to grow by weakening the immune system. Cigarette smoking

and excess alcohol reduce immune system function.

Proper immune system functioning depends on adequate levels of several nutrients. Vitamin A is critical for immune system health in surfaces that come in contact with the outside environment. This includes eyes/ ear/nose /throat, the lungs, the gastrointestinal tract and the urogenital system. Normally, the body makes vitamin A from building blocks in plants called carotenoids. Beta carotene is one you may be familiar with. It is the plant pigment that causes the color we find in carrots. If thyroid levels are low, beta carotene will not be converted into vitamin A, but will build up in the skin of the feet and palms (This condition is call "carotenemia"). If your skin in these areas has a yellow tint, you may have low thyroid and consequently low vitamin A levels. Choose a supplement containing 15-25000 IU of vitamin A (Make sure it says vitamin A, not beta carotene).

Vitamin D3 has been known for its importance in bone health. However, recent studies have shown that this vitamin is actually a hormone, important in immune function, blood pressure control, preventing multiple sclerosis, diabetes and cancer, and relieving chronic pain. Even if you live in a sunny area and get plenty of sunshine, you are still likely to have suboptimal levels of this protective hormone. The only way to tell is to have your vitamin D level tested. Currently, the best research suggests levels should range between 70 and 100 ng/ml. Many of my patients have combated viral infections by just increasing their amount of vitamin D to 50,000 IU/day for 3-4 days. 5,000 IU/day, in my experience, is the minimum a person should be taking. Testing is the best way to tell if your levels are protective.

Vitamin C has a long history as an effective immune booster. Taking 2,000 mg of vitamin C every hour until diarrhea is produced is a way to find out how much vitamin C you need. This amount will be increased with illness or stress. I tolerate 10,000 mg of C when well. With a cold the amount goes up to 30,000. Find out what your normal requirement for vitamin C is and take that on a daily basis. If you get stomach upset from regular vitamin C, choose a buffered product.

Zinc and selenium are minerals that support immune function. I normally have patients take 15-30 mg of zinc and 400mcg of selenium. Selenium also supports thyroid function.

Among the most important ways the body keeps itself well is by capturing iodine/iodide on cell membranes. If these nutrients are available, your cells will use them as a natural disinfectant. Iodine in the body works in a similar way to chlorine in your swimming pool. These two minerals are so much alike that chlorine can be taken up instead of iodine. Iodine is critical for thyroid function. If you are exposed to too much chlorine, it can cause thyroid dysfunction. Chlorine is in most municipal water. This is also the case with fluoride and bromine. Many dental products and water sources contain fluoride. Bromine is found in baked goods. An excellent source of iodine is seaweed. This is not common in most American diets. An alternative is a supplement called "Iodoral" which contains both iodine and iodide. Some cells in the body prefer one over the other, so it's important to get both in your supplement.

If you have been exposed to multiple rounds of antibiotics, your population of "good bacteria" may be low. To resolve this, take a supplemental probiotic. These good bacteria reduce the ability of yeast to survive in your gut. The other protective mechanism in the gut is production of hydrochloric acid by stomach cells. If you are not producing enough HCL, you may have trouble digesting food, have lots of gas, or have heartburn/acid reflux. It seems paradoxical, but your heartburn may be due to not enough acid. HCL

kills yeast normally. If your levels are low, yeast will overgrow. If you have symptoms, try taking 600mg of betaine HCL-3-4 capsules with each meal and see if your symptoms improve. You may need to take more. Increase the dose until you feel a burning sensation in your stomach, then drop down to the next lowest dose.

There are a plethora of other products on the market that boast immune system augmenting properties. You don't usually need them. Get the sugar, grains and pasteurized cow's milk out of your diet, get your thyroid and vitamin D levels optimized, exercise, and supplement with the above nutrients. This regimen will make your immune system strong enough to keep you from getting most infections.