Preparing Yourself for the Flu Season Naturally

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Each winter the influenza virus wrecks havoc on our ability to work and play. Naturopathic medicine can help.

Symptoms of the flu include fever, fatigue, muscle aches, headache, runny nose, cough and stomach symptoms like nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. Sometimes a flu virus can come on slowly or it can hit suddenly without much notice. Each year this leads people to wonder how they can prevent themselves and their family from getting the flu. Naturopathic prevention and treatment of the flu virus includes vitamins and minerals, botanical medicine and lifestyle recommendations.

Vitamins and Minerals:
- **Vitamin C:** Vitamin C can greatly enhance the immune system’s ability to fight infections of many kinds. In controlled trials Vitamin C has been shown to aid in the prevention of influenza, as well as shortening the duration and reducing the severity of infections already contracted.

- **Zinc:** Zinc plays an important role in maintaining healthy immune function. Low levels of zinc are associated with a decrease in T cell function, a vital white blood cell that helps fight infections.

- **Vitamin A:** Vitamin A is also associated with T cell function, making it a vital component of a healthy immune system. Vitamin A maintains the integrity of mucus membranes, which are at the front line of our defenses against viral, bacterial, and parasitic infections.

Botanical Medicine:
- **Elderberry:** Research demonstrates that elderberry extract has particular immune-modulating and antioxidant properties that neutralize the activity of viruses so they can no longer enter the cell and replicate. The berries also contain vitamins A and C, and the
flavonoids quercetin, anthocyanin and rutin, all of which boost immune function.

- **Larch arabinogalactans** - Larch arabinogalactans are polysaccharides derived from the wood of the Western larch tree. These polysaccharides stimulate the immune system to fend off infections. Larch arabinogalactans have been studied and shown effective in adults, as well as children, which makes it a great choice for keeping the whole family healthy through the flu season.

- **Echinacea** - Echinacea also has the immune stimulating polysaccharides that give it an important role in naturopathic antiviral treatments. These polysaccharides naturally enhance the body’s resistance to infection.

**Lifestyle tips for the prevention and treatment of the flu:**

- **Sleep** - Maintaining a balanced sleep routine is one way to keep our immune system healthy. Adults need 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night to rejuvenate for the next day. Consistent inadequate sleep lowers the body’s defenses needed for fighting viral infections.

- **Stress** - While stress is a part of everyday life; excessive stress can decrease immune function and make it easier to come down with the flu. Establishing stress management techniques like deep breathing, exercise, yoga or meditation can help ensure that everyday stress won’t leave you vulnerable to the flu.

- **Diet** - A diet rich in fruits, vegetables and quality proteins is a foundation for a healthy immune system. Studies have shown that eating a sugary snack or meal can depress the immune system for several hours, creating a window of time during which it is easier to get the flu. Avoiding excessive sugar can keep the immune system working at the level needed to fend off viral infections, like the flu.

Most over-the-counter medications only treat the symptoms of the cold or flu virus. Naturopathic treatments include nutritional supplementation, lifestyle recommendations and immune-stimulating and antiviral botanicals that can support the body’s natural defenses. Talk to your naturopathic doctor today about the best choices to keep you and your family healthy through flu season.