

HEDGEROW HERBALS

The four-monthly newsletter from your local herbalist - Julie Dore
Articles, news, recipes and tips for a healthy you

Autumn/Winter 2007/8

FREE

Welcome to the late autumn and winter edition which includes information on improving your immune system to avoid colds, flu and other illnesses and how to live a healthy old age

BOOSTING THE IMMUNE SYSTEM

Your immune system is an amazing and complex collection of body systems that includes your skin, tears, blood, stomach acid as well as white blood cell making bone marrow. With autumn's mists creeping around it is an ideal time to ensure your immune system is in tip-top fighting order to keep colds and other illnesses at bay.

The first line of defence is your skin, a highly effective physical barrier until damaged. Natural gaps in this barrier have defences such as tears, saliva, stomach acid and mucus. However, even the best defensive fortress can be compromised and bacteria, fungus and viruses do get past and once inside the battle really begins. Antibodies patrol via our blood and lymph systems looking for any invading tissue. Once a pathogen is detected, armies of white blood cells, the immune system's foot soldiers, are produced to fight the invasion. Many are destroyed and the pus you see in cuts and boils is made up from dead bacteria and white blood cells.

Often in modern life we push our bodies too hard, subjecting them to stress, overtiredness or poor nutrition. All of these deplete our reserves and more seriously reduce the effectiveness of our immune system. If you are constantly getting colds and bugs and are taking over a week to recover or, if you constantly feel you are about to get a cold but it never actually develops, you have a weakened immune system. Try the following to give your immune system a fighting chance.

1. Sleep enables your immune system to repair and recuperate. It also

helps combat the immune destroying effects of stress. Aim for 6-7 hours of unbroken sleep for maximum effectiveness.



2. Exercise, but not to excess, helps stimulate the immune system. Physical movement increases circulation so blood flow is enhanced, nutrients, oxygen and antibodies reach tissues more efficiently. Deep breathing enhances the lymph system, a major player in fighting infections. Meditation is another valuable ally, which stimulates immune boosting hormones such as melatonin.



3. Cigarette smoke is full of toxins which destroy useful nutrients in our body. Similarly, alcohol this also reduces the ability of the white blood cells to replicate and fight. Eating sugar and fat stresses the body reducing our internally defences. So reduce or cut these out to stop your immune firing blanks!



4. A healthy diet arms our immune system. Eat plenty of lean protein, including oily fish for omega 3 fatty acid, and lots of fruit and vegetables of different colours especially kiwis, blueberries, broccoli and carrots.



Green or red bush tea and dark chocolate (75% cocoa solids) contain

immune boosting antioxidants too.

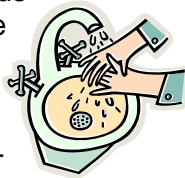
- If you've had a course of antibiotics then both good and healthy bacteria, especially in your gut, will have been destroyed. Replace the healthy bacteria (many produce vitamins) with a supplement of Acidophilus or a good quality live yoghurt. Eating probiotic foods



such as onions, leeks, slippery elm or artichokes

all provide foods for good bacteria (refined sugar and carbs. provide food for the bad ones)

- Wash your hands regularly; they are the most common way for germs to get past our outer defences and into our eyes, nose and mouth.



- Cold stimulates the immune system so there really is a benefit to turning the shower to cold every morning!

- Be happy! Stress, worry and depression all suppress our immune and studies have shown positive people and those with good social networks get ill less often than those who are negative, pessimistic or lonely.



- For reinforcements, call on medicinal plants. Garlic is a powerful anti-biotic and anti-viral. Make garlic honey (see below) and take half a teaspoon everyday. Astragalus is a good long term supporter of the immune system especially one weakened by stress. Echinacea is best used at the first signs of illness to increase white blood cell count but it must be a good quality (makes your mouth tingle). There are also herbs to combat the damaging effects of stress, tiredness and overwork. A mix of tonic and immune modulating herbs can be individually tailored to meet your needs by a medical herbalist.



Milk Vetch *Astragalus membranaceus*

GROWING OLD DISGRACFULLY IMPROVE YOUR HEALTHSPAN (i.e. feeling well - so you can behave disgracefully!)

There is no clear reasons why we age but what scientists have found out is the ageing itself does not lead to ill health. Most systems in your body have large built-in reserves, 5-10 times the capacity a person needs for normal life. Age diminishes this reserve capacity but this is not usually a problem unless you are further depleted by illness or drugs etc. However damage caused by toxins, pollutants, stress, inflammation and free-radicals (a by-product of our metabolism) accelerate ageing and lead to ill health. So to improve your health span, you should, where possible, stop doing things that accelerate ageing by modifying diet, behaviour and lifestyle. Studies have also shown that it is never too late to make a difference. Here are my suggestions.

Exercise - You don't have to join a gym. Walking, swimming, aqua aerobics, gardening, yoga, Pilates, Tai chi, and any type of dancing are all great. The important thing is that it is fun and you do it regularly.

- Improves heart and lung capacity
- Improves muscle tone and muscle to fat ratio so you are less likely to become overweight
- Strengthens weight bearing bones reducing the risk of osteoporosis
- Reduces your risk of developing dementia by up to a half

Have a glass of wine a day (red is best) with a couple of pieces of dark chocolate. Both contain antioxidants and chemicals in

the chocolate reduce the blood's clotting potential.

Reduce your stress, it really isn't worth the worry. Stress depletes the immune (see above), ages body systems and even makes osteoporosis worse.

Exercise the brain - do games, quizzes, learn a new craft, even do a degree.

Socialise – studies show that people with close friends and a good social life have stronger immune systems.

Diet - Improve digestion and appetite by taking bitters 20-30 minutes before a meal e.g. a glass of grapefruit juice or chew on a juniper berry. Black pepper added to food improves the absorption of nutrients.

Include:

- 5 portions of different coloured fruit and vegetables a day as these contain antioxidants that neutralise the free-radicals
- Beans and pulses for phyto-oestrogens, beneficial to post menopausal women and to older men as they reduce the incidence of prostate problems
- Essential fats, omega 3 especially (try oily fish, Flax or Hemp oil)
- Soluble fibre e.g. oats

Reduce:

- Refined sugar & carbohydrates (e.g. wholegrain not white bread)
- Processed foods
- Saturated fats
- Omega 6 oils (e.g. sunflower oil) if you already suffer from an inflammatory condition like arthritis as they can make it worse
- Salt

Finally, drink plenty of water and reduce caffeine intake.

HERBS

They can improve your health span in several ways:

- Reduce the need for conventional drugs and therefore the likelihood of side effects
- Prevent the need for some drugs altogether e.g. to control blood sugar, lower cholesterol or blood pressure, help natural sleep, reduce stress and mild depression, improve circulation, ease constipation, boost the immune system
- As general tonics and to restore the body to a healthy balance

A Few Examples

Cayenne pepper: use if feeling weak or cold; added to a cream will provide pain relief to joints etc.

Dandelion leaf: a natural, safe diuretic for fluid retention and mild high blood pressure

Dandelion root: a natural laxative and liver tonic

Lavender oil: calming, helps sleep if added to your pillow, good for skin problems

Bilberry: strengthens the blood vessels in the eye so improving eye health

Lime blossom: helps lower blood pressure and cholesterol

Nettle leaf: full of vitamins and minerals especially iron, good for anaemia, and silica to help prevent dementia

Nettle root: helps reduce benign tumours of the prostate, use with Saw palmetto and pumpkin seeds

Chamomile: calms a nervous stomach, helps restful sleep

Peppermint: take as a tea after meals to reduce wind (but not if you suffer from heartburn)

Turmeric: anti-inflammatory; good for IBS and joint problems

Two wonder herbs for the older person are:

Hawthorn – the nurse of the heart

Very safe, it can be taken long-term and in addition to heart medicines as a tonic to the heart.



Hawthorn *Crataegus oxyacanthus*

- Increases blood flow in coronary arteries nourishing the heart and helpful in angina
- Dilates the arteries in hands and feet so reducing the workload on the heart, lowering blood pressure and increasing blood flow to the tissues
- Steadies the heart beat, good if you have irregular beats

- Improves the ability of the heart muscle to contract so improving the pumping action but allowing the heart rate to slow
- Encourages growth of new arteries after a heart attack
- Lowers cholesterol in blood and reduces deposits on the blood vessel walls
- Calming, so good for tension and stress



Garlic *Allium sativa*

Garlic – used for over 5000 years as a medicinal plant, its active ingredient is allicin. (Must be used raw as cooking destroys its many properties)

- Anti-bacterial (use to prevent holiday tummy bugs)
- Anti-viral (protects against chest infections because the oil is excreted via the lungs disinfecting them –and making your breath smell!)
- Antifungal
- Anti worm
- Enhances the immune system
- Acts as an expectorant and reduces catarrh
- Reduces wind
- Lowers cholesterol & fats in the blood
- Reduces the blood's ability to clot (DO NOT USE RAW GARLIC OR CAPSULES IF TAKING BLOOD THINNING DRUGS)
- Moderates blood sugar levels

- Antioxidant to keep us healthy

Try garlic honey– two whole bulbs of (organic) garlic, skins removed and finely crushed with a pestle and mortar until transparent. Add to 450g (1lb) of honey (organic or locally produced). Use as a tonic taking ½ tsp daily. For chest infections or gut infections take ½ tsp 3 times daily. Take on its own or add to lemon and water, milk or herb vinegar (esp. thyme).

So now all you need to do is go out and behave disgracefully!

EXCITING NEWS

I am now available for herbal consultations at a new venue, Royston Complementary Health Centre. To mark this new venture I will be hosting an open morning on 1st December where you can have a FREE blood pressure and body fat % check, 10 minute mini consultation and try some herbal teas.

DIARY DATES

A Herbal Workshop Learn about traditional and modern herbal remedies, how to make your own to treat common ailments and possible herbal Christmas present ideas. It is taking place on **Saturday 17th November** at St Ives Complementary Health 2pm to 4pm, price £20 including some goodies to take away. Places are limited so book now – phone 01480 492088.

My popular plant safaris will be running again from late spring at Milton, Sandy and a new one at Fen Drayton Lakes (27th April) plus two day long herbal workshops at West stow (18th May) and Wicken Fen (22nd June).

So roll on **SPRING!**

THIS NEWSPAPER IS PUBLISHED 3 TIMES A YEAR SO LOOK OUT FOR THE NEXT EDITION OF HEDGEROW-HERBAL NEWS WHICH WILL BE AVAILABLE FROM MARCH 2008

Visit the Hedgerow Herbals website www.hedgerow-herbals.co.uk.

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