

Prevent H1N1 and Other Influenzas...Naturally

Pandemic or Panic?

In my ten year plus medical career, I've yet to see the media or public health officials stir such fear as they currently have with regards to the current "swine flu" or H1N1 scare. According to public polls, there is quite a bit of public skepticism about the safety and value of the respective H1N1 vaccine. A poll by the Harvard School of Public Health found that only forty percent of respondents say they will get the vaccine. In September, Consumer Reports conducted a telephone poll to see if parents of young children would vaccinate their children against the H1N1 virus. Almost two-thirds of those polled said they would wait or would refuse the vaccine for their children.

Safety of H1N1 Vaccine

From a safety standpoint, several reasons for concern are cited. Unlike typical vaccines, the H1N1 vaccine contains untested adjuvants (pharmacological or immunological agents) which act to trigger a faster immune response. This under-tested vaccine could therefore have unexpected consequences in the future. Under normal circumstances, the FDA requires longer trial periods before vaccines hit the market. However, in the case of a pandemic, government health officials allow these regulations to be bypassed. And in cases such as public health emergencies, vaccine companies are not culpable in civil courts if harm comes to an individual as a result of a vaccine.

Natural Medicines Boost Ability to Prevent and Fight Influenzas

For these reason, many are looking for alternate means to protect against the H1N1 influenza virus. Naturopathic medicine uses measures that stimulate our innate ability to prevent illness and to heal. Focus is placed on increasing the resistance of the individual. Naturopathic medicine promotes strategies to promote an environment less hospitable to an invading pathogen. Look to some of the natural supplements supported in scientific literature and clinically to prevent H1N1 and other influenzas rather you decide to receive the H1N1 vaccine or not.

Vitamin D Status Linked to Influenza Susceptibility

Vitamin D plays an integral role in immune system function by increasing the production of small antimicrobial proteins called peptides and by preventing over-expression of inflammatory mediators. The observation that influenza hits in the winter months when vitamin D levels are at their lowest and not the summer months when they are at their highest, ultimately lead to the recognition of its role in promoting immunity and preventing influenza. John Cannell, M.D., leading researcher on vitamin D and director of the Vitamin Council, was first to put forward the proposed relationship between influenza pandemics and vitamin D deficiency.

Upwards of 50% of the population is deficient in vitamin D. Vitamin D deficiency increases vulnerability to influenza illness. I routinely test my patients' vitamin D levels and find the majority quite deficient. The RDA recommended level of 400-800 IU daily has done nothing to correct this. A more appropriate dose of 2000-5000 IU daily and throughout the winter months is

needed to lower H1N1 influenza risk and restore vitamin D levels in most patients. For children, Cannell recommends 1,000 IU daily for every 55 pounds of body weight.

Botanical Medicines Fight Infection and Boost Immunity

In the natural world, plants evolve to possess molecules that provide resistance to pathogens. Any given plant may have hundreds of different chemicals, several of which may be devoted to its defenses. It's these molecules that give many plant medicines their value in preventing and fighting infections in humans.

Medical mushrooms are trustworthy and well studied for their ability to increase general immunity. The mushrooms Maitake, Reishi and Shiitake are standout members of this group. They are rich in polysaccharides which yield much of their immune enhancing qualities. Medicinal mushrooms enhance white blood cell production, inhibit viral replication and can be used long term to prevent infections. They are best taken in powdered form or capsules.

Astragalus Membranaceus has been used for hundreds of years by practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine. It's one of my favorite botanicals because of its ability to raise general immunity by increasing white blood cell count and activity, and by directly fighting viral and bacterial illnesses. I often prescribe it in tincture form with other botanicals the entire winter months to ward off colds and flu.

Colostrum beats vaccine in flu prevention. In 2007, researchers at G. d'Annunzio University in Italy looked at the ability of colostrum to prevent influenza and compared it to the influenza vaccine. At a dose of just one 400 mg capsule a day, they found it to be three times more effective than the influenza vaccine in flu prevention in both healthy and high-risk persons with cardiovascular disease.

Diet Influences Immune Function

The wholesomeness of your diet has strong influence on your immunity. Studies have shown that the immune system's response to an invading pathogen is slowed down when sugary foods have been consumed. It's always good principle to limit not only sweets but refined carbohydrates such as white flour—especially during flu season or during an infection. So dump the cookies, soda, juice, candy and other sweets in preference to whole grains, fresh fruit and vegetables, and lean protein to give your immune system the resources needed to function optimally.

Your immune system is designed to prevent and defeat the H1N1 influenza and other infections. It simply requires the proper intention, environment and raw materials to do so. You can provide this by eating a whole foods diet, insuring optimal vitamin D levels, taking colostrum and using medicinal plants to increase immune system function.