

Ayurveda - Health notes

Immunity Care in Winter

Vital Health Topic: Ways to Boost Immunity This Winter

There is a theory of immunity in ayurveda called the beej-bhumi theory, which means "seed and land." In this case, the body is analogous to the land, and infection or "bugs" are like seeds. If the body is filled with ama and lacking in ojas, the infection will find it to be fertile ground for spreading, just as land that is fertile will sprout many seeds. If digestion is strong, and ojas rather than ama predominates in the body, then the seeds of infection will not be able to take hold, just as seeds will not take root in land that is infertile.

Everyone is more susceptible to respiratory problems when the seasons are changing, such as in the Autumn and spring. This is because the body functions differently in each season, and in the transition between the hot and cold seasons the agni, or digestive fire, can start to fluctuate dramatically. If you do not adjust your diet and routine and follow the ayurvedic guidelines for the seasonal transitions, you can build up ama. Once the body is fertile for disease, it is easy for a cold or flu to sprout, as in the seed and land theory mentioned earlier.

That is why respiratory illnesses and allergies abound in the Autumn and spring. In the early spring, there is an added factor, because ama accumulated during the winter starts to melt, flooding the micro-channels and overloading the immune system. The body's immune system is weakened, and becomes a fertile ground for bacteria and allergens.

WAYS TO BURN AMA

For this reason, Maharishi Ayurveda recommends that you do the gentle purification treatments called panchakarma during these transitions between the seasons, Autumn and spring. Maharishi Panchakarma includes a full program of ayurvedic massage, steam baths and intestinal cleansing treatments, to rid your body of ama accumulated during the previous season. Panchakarma also strengthens your agni, or digestive fire, so more ama won't be accumulated.

Panchakarma treatments should be performed under the supervision of an ayurvedic physician. But if you can't go to a Maharishi Ayurveda Health Center for internal cleansing, you can still follow an ayurvedic regimen at home to cleanse the body of ama during the transition between the seasons. For instance, you can eat warm, light, nourishing foods such as soups, or light meals of mildly spiced vegetables with grains such as quinoa, cous cous and millet. Eating a lighter diet for a few weeks while the weather is changing will help burn away ama rather than accumulate it. Also be careful to get proper rest, drink plenty of warm fluids, and take daily walks or do other exercise that is suitable for your body type.

If you feel less hungry at mealtimes than usual, or if you feel heavy and dull in the two hours immediately after a meal, these are indications that your digestive fire is burning low. To help enhance your agni, add Pomegranate Chutney as a condiment for your meal. Visit the recipes section at <http://www.mapi.com> for our recipe for pomegranate chutney.

Cooking your food with immune-enhancing spices such as cumin, fennel, coriander, turmeric, ginger and black pepper is also an important way to enhance agni and reduce ama. You can also take one tablet of the Maharishi Ayurveda herbal supplement Herbal Digest with each meal to enhance digestion, or take two to three tablets of Herbal Cleanse at night if you are feeling constipated.

Another very effective way to purify the body of ama at the change of seasons is to take Detox-Pitta , one tablet morning and evening, for 45 days in the spring and the fall.

Finally, it's important to always avoid the factors that cause ama to accumulate, in any season. Stay away from leftovers, processed foods, ice-cold foods and drinks, and heavy foods such as fried foods. Vegetables from the nightshade family (potatoes, tomatoes, eggplant, and sweet peppers) should also be avoided, as these create ama.

DIET FOR BOOSTING NATURAL IMMUNITY

Winter is actually the season to enhance the immune system, and support and nurture your body. Eat nourishing, warm food, and avoid any fasting in winter. This is the most effective time to take Amrit to nourish and rejuvenate your mind and body. The important thing is to eat light, warm foods, cooked with the immune-enhancing spices already mentioned. Avoid eating or drinking anything cold, because cold foods and drinks will enhance the impact of cold weather and reduce the digestive fire, leading to more ama. You'll also want to avoid heavy sweets, as these are difficult to digest. Start your day with a stewed apple for breakfast, cooked with spices such as cardamom.

For specific food recommendations, follow a Vata pacifying diet in Autumn (early September to late December). Eat all six tastes, but eat more of the sweet, sour, and salty tastes, as these enhance Vata. Vata-pacifying foods include nourishing grains such as rice and couscous; sweet, juicy fruits such as cooked apples or pears; squashes, courgette, and asparagus; and light, easily digestible proteins such as panir (a freshly made cheese), lassi (a yogurt drink that aids digestion) and vegetable proteins such as mung dhal. Asparagus is especially good for enhancing the immune system.

LIFESTYLE TIPS FOR BOOSTING IMMUNITY

A warm bath each day is very necessary to warm the body, open the pores, and regulate your body's internal thermostat. This is important in both Vata and Kapha season.

Don't forget to do your daily ayurvedic massage before your bath. Daily massage is very important for opening the channels, stimulating the digestion, removing toxins from the body, and pacifying the doshas. It is especially soothing to Vata dosha, which is seated in the skin. All of these factors make massage a vital therapy in strengthening immunity and preventing respiratory problems. (It's important to note that massage is NOT recommended if you already have a cough or other respiratory imbalance, because it can push the ama deeper into the system. Also refrain from a full-body massage during menstrual flow.)

Take Blissful Sleep - Vata if you have trouble falling asleep (a Vata disorder), Blissful Sleep-Pitta if you wake frequently, especially between 2:00 and 4:00 a.m. with energy (a Pitta disorder) and take Blissful Sleep-Kapha if you sleep eight hours through the night but still feel exhausted when you wake up (a Kapha disorder).

Exercise is another important aspect of the ayurvedic routine, because it helps enhance agni and burns away toxins. It's important to choose the right exercise for your body type and for the season, though. Daily walks and yoga postures are good for balancing all the doshas and especially suit Vata types, while more vigorous daily exercise is required by Kapha types to stay healthy. Exercise is especially important during Kapha season, because it helps to boost agni and your immunity when toxins are flooding the body.

HERBS FOR HEALTH

You can drink a warm, immune-enhancing tea such as Sniffle Free Tea, twice a day with your meal or after it. The herbs in this thermogenic tea will help balance Kapha immediately. If your head is feeling heavy or congested, you can also use Sniffle Free Aroma oil to help create balance and clear the sinuses.

Bio-Immune tablets, Breath Easy Aroma Oil and Cold Season Defence tablets are all immune-enhancing herbal supplements that you can take during the winter season to prevent respiratory problems. Bio-Immune is a powerful supplement that strengthens neuro-

prevent respiratory problems. Bio-Immune is a powerful supplement that strengthens neuro-immunal responses, purifies the liver and blood, and dissolves ama and amavisha. Take one tablet of Bio-Immune each morning and evening to enhance overall immunity.

Cold Season Defence offers nutritional support to strengthen the body's natural immunity. It regulates fluid balance and mucus in the lungs and sinuses; removes toxins and shleshma from the lungs, and cleanses the micro-circulatory channels that have been blocked by ama. It boosts immunity and removes toxins that weaken resistance.

Breath Easy is aimed more at the upper respiratory system, and bolsters the body's natural resistance to the cold. Breath Easy helps clear the channels, and when that happens, shleshma can be drained from the body. It strengthens the digestive fire, balances the production of moisture and mucus, improves resistance to cold temperatures, and enhances the bioavailability and circulation of vital nutrients. .

Another herbal product for the throat and lungs is Congestive Throat Formula. This mild-tasting yet effective syrup helps balance the level of fluids in the lungs, throat, and sinuses; eliminates ama; and nourishes the blood and nutritive fluids to boost resistance.

You can see that all of these formulas are aimed at restoring balance, and they help repair the underlying imbalance, and strengthen the immune system, rather than treat the superficial level of the symptoms. The problem with the symptomatic approach is that it doesn't solve the problem, which will likely come back again and again.