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PATIENT EDUCATION SERIES

HELP PROTECT AGAINST MEASLES INFECTION BY BUILDING A STRONG IMMUNE SYSTEM

While debate rages over whether or not it should be mandatory for parents to vaccinate their children against communicable diseases, there is little debate that building a strong immune system is one way to protect yourself against measles or any other viral outbreaks.

To date, the question of vaccination remains a personal choice between patient and doctor, but regardless of your measles vaccination status, infectious disease outbreaks illustrate why it's important to have a strong immune system. A strong immune system will make you less vulnerable to catching disease, decreasing your susceptibility to whatever is going around. And should you, heaven forbid, catch something nasty, a strong immune system will reduce the severity and duration of your symptoms, helping you survive and to recover much more quickly.

Your immune status is determined by a number of factors including your age, current medical conditions, diet, nutrition and environmental exposures.

Age is a factor because some infections, such as childhood diseases are more likely to affect the younger population, and illnesses such as pneumonia are more common among the elderly as they are often confined. Medical conditions are a determinant because people with chronic conditions such as asthma, for example, are more vulnerable to all air borne diseases. Likewise, the use of steroids such as to control an auto-immune diseases, can lower a person's immune status.

Diet and nutrition may be the strongest determinants of all. This is because eating a junk food diet, which is high in sugar, and deficient in protein, vitamins and minerals, means that your body does not have the necessary building blocks to produce the components of a strong immune system, namely white blood cells and immunoglobulins (T-cells, B-cells, macrophages and natural killer cells). These

natural warriors gobble up and destroy nasty invaders that find their way into your bloodstream.

Environmental factors that increase susceptibility include working around children who are more likely to become infected, such as in a day care center, or working around people who are already ill, such as in a hospital or other inpatient medical facility.

So what can you do to boost yours and your child's immunity? The basics are the first best defense, proper diet and a healthy lifestyle, along with nutritional supplements and herbal medicines. For example, a previous measles outbreak occurred in the United States in 2011. Epidemiological research later found that the majority of children who suffered severe symptoms of the disease were deficient in Vitamin A. Supplementing this nutrient shortened the duration of their disease. And a study published in the Oxford Journal concluded that vitamin A treatments are an effective intervention to prevent measles mortality in children. ¹

Consider the following naturopathic prescription for building a healthy immune system.

- Get adequate sleep - insufficient sleep severely depletes your immune system
- Healthy protein rich diet, fresh fruits, green foods
- Avoid sugar, excess dairy, gluten, alcohol, smoking and food allergens
- Take daily Probiotics - 90% of our immune system in the gut
- Echinacea herbal capsules or tea - builds white blood cells
- Astragalus herbal capsules - prevents cellular DNA damage
- Vitamin A
- Vitamin C
- Vitamin D3
- Practice routine hand washing
- Watch for infected persons
- Watch for signs of illness; intervene as soon as they are seen; stay home!
- Symptoms of measles infection include sudden high fever, runny nose, rash, tiny pink spots in the mouth, diarrhea
- Consult with your doctor at the first signs of illness.

Use these measures as a guide. Consult with a qualified naturopath who can professionally advise you on the appropriate dosing of the above nutrients and ensure that they are both safe for you and also suitable for your specific health needs.

Don't wait for this outbreak to reach our shores before you supercharge your immune system. Start today to get the jump on the next bad bug that rears its head. Take steps today to boost your immune system so when an epidemic strikes, as they surely will from time to time, you and your household can feel more secure.

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ⁱ International Journal of Epidemiology, vol. 39, issue 1, pp. 148-155