How to Recognise A Weakened Immune System and What to Do About It

Most of us know that our health is one of the most valuable things we have, particularly at a time like this. There are ways that can help you get over an illness faster, but one of the best ways to fight illness is to prevent it in the first place.

In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, many are taking additional precautions to stay healthy. Regular and thorough hand washing, and practicing social distancing or self-isolation are key to preventing the spread of the virus. However, it's also important to have a strong immune system that can fight back against the germs you may encounter. These germs aren't isolated to coronavirus, they can also be 'normal' cold and flu.

If you've noticed that you're often sick, feel fatigued or have other nagging symptoms you can't figure out, it may mean your immune system is weakened. There are often warning signs that may give you the time to make changes and boost your immunity before becoming ill.

In this newsletter we'll take a look at five warning signs that may indicate that your immune system is under pressure as well as five strategies to reduce the risk of this happening in the future.

THE 5 IMMUNE SYSTEM WARNING BELLS

1. Your Stress Level is Sky-High

It's not a coincidence that you tend to get sick after a big project at work, the end of a school term or following an emotional situation at home. It is known that long-term stress weakens the responses of your immune system - stress decreases your body's lymphocytes, the white blood cells that help fight off infection. The lower your lymphocyte levels, the more you are at risk for viruses like the common cold.



2. You Always Have a Cold or Frequent Infections



It's perfectly normal for people to sneeze and sniffle through two or three colds a year and most people bounce back in 7 to 10 days. The good news is that during that time, your body's immune system is developing antibodies to fight off those germs in future.

But if you're constantly catching colds – or have a cold that won't go away – that's a clear sign your immune system is struggling to keep up.

Battling frequent infections? Your immune system might be sending you red flags. For example:

- Having more than four ear infections in one year
- Developing pneumonia twice during a one-year period
- Suffering from chronic sinusitis or more than three episodes of bacterial sinusitis in a year
- Needing more than two courses of antibiotics a year.

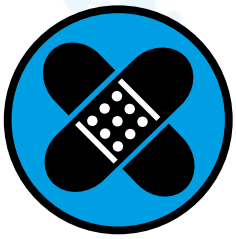
3. You Have Lots of Stomach Troubles



If you have frequent diarrhoea, gas or constipation, this can also be a sign that your immune system is compromised. Research shows that 70-80% of your immune system is located in your digestive tract. 'Gut health' has become a recent catch phrase, but it may be worth focusing on, if your immunity is compromised.

The beneficial bacteria and micro-organisms that live in your gut help to defend against infection and support the immune system. Low amounts of these helpful gut bacteria can leave you at risk to viruses, chronic inflammation and even auto-immune disease.

4. Your Wounds Are Slow to Heal



Your skin goes into damage control mode after you get a burn, cut or scrape. Your body works to protect the wound by sending nutrient-rich blood to the injury to help regenerate new skin.

This healing process depends on healthy immune cells, but if your immune system is sluggish, your skin can't

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regenerate and your wounds may linger and have a hard time healing.

5. You Feel Tired All the Time



You know that burning the candle at both ends is bound to leave you feeling sluggish, but if you're getting enough sleep and still suffering from exhaustion, it's worth considering whether it's your immune system trying to tell you something.

WHAT IS A 'STRONG' IMMUNE SYSTEM?

When your immune system struggles, so does you energy level. Your body is often trying to conserve energy to fuel a poor or overloaded immune system fighting off germs, rather than giving your body and mind the energy to hop skip and jump your way into the day!

If the warning signs we've talked about above are familiar, you need to give your immune system some extra attention. A few lifestyle changes and new habits can naturally keep your immune system strong and healthy.

Your immune system is a 'system'. Its primary purpose is to protect against bacteria or viruses that seek to attack your body. Your immune system is the gatekeeper for what gets in and what stays out of your body. When it is working strongly, the viruses and toxins have a real battle on their hands to get in, but when it's weakened, it makes it much easier for those germs to breach that defence.

The good news is there are many things you can do to keep your immune system strong and healthy.

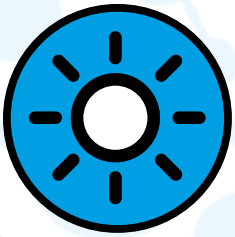
5 WAYS TO BUILD A STRONG IMMUNE SYSTEM

1. Regular Exercise



There are numerous benefits to exercise, including prevention of arthritis, diabetes, heart conditions, and more but exercise has also been shown to enhance and improve different components of the immune system. Exercise also improves your sleep quality and increases immune function. Go for a walk (even if it's around your house or garden at the moment), find some fun exercises online, sign up to a course or class and commit to a routine.

2. Soak up the Sun



Enjoy moderate exposure to sunlight a few times each week. Vitamin D (which comes from UV rays) is key for strengthening your immune system. If you're not able to get outside, consider a Vitamin D supplement as a substitute. Fresh air is good for everyone!

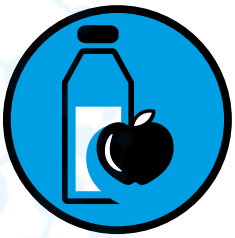
3. Be Mindful



Keep stress minimal. Try meditating to give your brain some down time. Nothing good ever comes from worrying. Your body will be in a more relaxed state and feel rejuvenated with some peace and quiet. Use an app to follow a meditation routine or a yoga programme to aid in your relaxation. Regular massage is also proven to reduce stress by releasing endorphins, your happy hormones. While you can't drop into your massage therapist right now, you can contact them and ask them for some self-massage strategies.

You can get into a vicious cycle of stress and depression, feeling poorly and having low energy levels, which results in a lack of sleep, reduced or no exercise and often bad dietary choices. This in turn feeds back into the cycle of stress, depression, anxiety, feeling terrible, developing a cold etc. Mental health is a key component to your general health and immune system. Finding what helps you, like talking to a friend or counsellor, may in turn help to promote a healthy immune system.

4. Keep your Gut Healthy



Foods with good bacteria, like live yoghurt, have positive health benefits. Probiotics can help your digestive system function normally and stay balanced. Essentially following a well-balanced diet (everything in moderation) will be good for you. Having plenty of fresh, natural products, fruits and vegetables, while minimising processed, junk food will help promote a healthy gut.

5. Get Enough Sleep



It's a simple thing really, getting a good night's sleep. It's your body's chance to rest and recover. Aim for 7-9 good hours each night. Removing distractions, going to bed when you're tired, and eliminating sugary foods late in the day may help. Avoid binge watching TV, or too much screen time before bed. A simple routine of no devices for at least 10 minutes or more before bed with a hot shower and possibly a quiet meditation may set your mind at ease for a sound night's sleep.

Little Daily Habits = Long Lasting Effects

Replacing bad health habits with good ones can help you keep a strong immune system. Here are a few daily habits you can easily incorporate:

- Wash your hands frequently
- Laugh more, sing, or dance (no one is watching!)
- Eat more fruit and vegetables
- Drink plenty of water
- Monitor your blood pressure
- Take a multi-vitamin.

Use these tips to identify when your immune system may be low or compromised and make small changes to your daily life or routine to ensure a strong immunity to give you the best chance possible of fighting off an illness.

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