

The Strong, Silent Type



Health Matters

By Kerry Sauser

Did you know that you have a round the clock security system plus an internal SWAT team at your disposal 24 hours a day, seven days a week? It's called your Immune System and it has been at work for you since the day you were born.

The immune system could be described as the strong, silent type; unless there is a problem, we never know it is there. Without it however, our bodies would be overcome by hostile invaders in a matter of hours. To protect us, our immune system creates protective barriers, searches out invaders, terminates and removes them. The immune system has no mercy and takes no prisoners.

That's good, because it's a rough world out there. Every day we are assaulted by thousands of entities who want to control our bodies. They try to eat us, to live in us, and to use us as hatcheries to reproduce. Luckily, most of these nasty entities are microscopic--bacteria, viruses, parasites, and fungi to name a few. (We know them as germs.) Even though these invaders are tiny, without the protection of our immune system, we would quickly be overcome by them. Consider what happens to a body without an active immune system,

such as a dead body. It is attacked and consumed by these microscopic enemies, and within a matter of days, it decomposes. The same would happen to our living bodies without our ever vigilant immune system.

The complex immune system includes the thymus, spleen, lymph system, bone marrow, white blood cells (16 types), antibodies (5 classes, millions of individual types), complements and hormones—even skin plays a role as a barrier to infections. Some of these parts act as "soldiers" and some the "weapons" that identify and destroy germ invaders. Some communicate information about the fight, and others are responsible for creating, housing or transporting the "soldiers," the "weapons" and ultimately the dead enemy germs out of the body. Scientists continue to discover how this incredibly sophisticated system works, but you don't need details to understand the importance of a strong one.

Your immune system is the reason cuts and bruises heal; it is why you get over a cold or the flu, and it saves you from getting food poisoning every time you eat the hundreds of germs that inhabit every meal. Thanks to our immune system, we can move through the world without being afraid that everyone and everything we encounter will make us sick. So although mostly silent, its role is vital to our survival.

The immune system carries a heavy load. Besides germs, debris like dirt, pollen and pollutants can also enter and damage our bodies. The immune system handles this type of cleanup, too. We often add to the load ourselves by getting hurt (cuts, bruises, broken bones)

or ingesting toxins (such as foods with preservatives or chemicals, cigarette smoke, alcohol, drugs, pesticides, herbicides, or petroleum products). And finally, problems in other parts of our bodies can contribute to the load our immune system carries.

Sometimes the load becomes too much, and problems occur. Allergies and auto-immune disorders such as rheumatoid arthritis and multiple sclerosis are examples of immune system problems. More subtly, recurrent illnesses, or a run-down feeling can also be signals of a tired immune system.

There are a number of ways to keep your immune system in good operating condition. Most important is eating a diet containing plenty of fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Vitamin D3, echinacea, elderberry, garlic, some homeopathic remedies and olive leaf extract can lend natural support to the immune system. Include sufficient sleep and exercise in your daily routine to further improve your immune health.

My patients are often surprised to discover that a properly functioning digestive system is quite important to immune system health. Poor digestion can allow undigested food and related toxins into the bloodstream. The immune system then treats such particles like germs, and it goes into attack mode. If digestion is not fixed, the immune system will stay on high alert and work overtime to eliminate the particles. (Nearly impossible if problem food is eaten regularly.) In such cases, the immune system gets "worn out," and as a result, one becomes more susceptible to real diseases and infections. A number of diagnostic tests can detect and identify such conditions, and if the condition is present, diet can be adjusted

to improve digestion and alleviate stress on the immune system. Taking a probiotic or digestive enzymes will enhance digestion and can help prevent such problems.

I have a quote that hangs in my exam room that wonderfully describes the benefit of a strong immune system. "Illnesses hover constantly above us, their seeds blown by the winds, but they do not set in the terrain unless the terrain is ready to receive them." A healthy immune system is what keeps our bodies from becoming fertile terrain for illnesses. Be sure to fortify your immune system so it remains strong and silent as it protects your body's terrain during fall cold and flu season.

Until next month...Heal well, Be well....naturally!

K.S.

P.S. For a more detailed look at our amazingly complex immune system, see www.health.howstuffworks.com and go to Human Body, Body Systems, Immune System.

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