

Fight The Bug!

“I always catch a cold or flu during the change of seasons. Everybody around me gets it; so I end up getting sick two or three times a year. That’s normal, right?” **WRONG!!!**

It is true that germs, viruses, and bacteria are all around us, but it is not necessary for us to fall sick every time we are exposed to them. Babies and children tend to get sick more frequently than adults because their immune systems are not fully developed, but a healthy adult should be able to fend off these minor illnesses and get the quality of life that they deserve.

Free Radicals

When the body burns glucose (sugar) for energy, free radicals are the potentially dangerous by-product of the energy-producing process, just like burning wood in a fire produces useful heat but also potentially dangerous sparks and smoke.

These free radicals create a chain reaction of damage in the body. If a chain reaction takes off, it can kill body cells or just make the body less efficient and less responsive. For example, if the cells attacked are in the kidney, then kidney function will gradually decline. If the affected cells are in the skin, there will be slower turn over of skin cells, meaning less collagen and a gradual loss of skin tone and texture. If free radicals attack the cell’s genetic material (DNA), it can, if not repaired in time, lead to cancer.




But before you panic, you have to remember that the human body is created very resilient and it is usually good at keeping free radicals at bay. The body can adapt to a moderately increased level of free radicals by making more antioxidant enzymes. It is only when the free radical load gets too heavy that it overrides the body’s defences and leads to illness.



Some minor changes in our daily habits can reduce our exposure to free radicals significantly. Other positive eating and lifestyle habits (such as eating healthy and exercising) could largely improve our bodies’ immunity and handling of free radicals, thus decreasing the chances of illness.

What am I doing wrong?

Very often, many of our daily activities contribute to free radical damage and have a significant effect on our immunity and ability to fight disease. Some examples include:

Smoking loads the body with free radicals and each cigarette reduces the life expectancy of a smoker by 10 minutes.

-  **Smoking** – it loads the body with trillions of free radicals. Smoking has also been linked to heart disease, cancer and premature death. It creates deficiencies of anti-oxidants in the body (such as vitamin C).
-  **Excessive exercise** – Very high levels of exercise create more free radicals than the bodily defences can cope with, so athletes need anti-oxidant supplements. Moderate exercise, however, stimulates the production of the body’s anti-oxidant enzymes, which slow the ageing process.
-  **Sun bathing** – too much sun ages the skin, causes skin cancer and stimulates the production of free radicals in the body.
- **Stress** – it plays a major role in immunity and has detrimental effects on our body’s defence mechanisms. It increases free radicals and ‘fight or flight’ hormones in the body, making the body more susceptible to invaders.

- **Unhealthy diet** – a diet low in nutrients will add no value to the body and will only decrease immunity. Foods to be avoided include: *dairy products and red meat, sugar, refined foods* (such as cakes, biscuits, white bread and pasta, white rice), *alcohol* and *caffeine*
- **Sugar** - it comes in many forms such as in desserts, biscuits, chocolate, added to tea, in some savoury dishes, and also hidden in ingredients lists of ready-made snacks. Sugar is known to depress the immune system for up to 15 hours after intake. So if your sugar intake is constant, then your immune system is continuously low!
- **Alcohol** – it depletes B vitamins, and excess alcohol is converted to fat. Excessive drinking can lead to obesity and cardiovascular disease and lowers immunity.
-  **Caffeine** – it can interfere with mineral absorption and increase the insulin produced by the pancreas, leading to low blood sugar. It may also seriously affect the digestive system. Coffee is also known to raise blood pressure. It increases PMS, osteoporosis, and the risk of miscarriage and birth problems.
- **Overweight** – leads to many diseases such as diabetes and high cholesterol, and encourages lack of exercise.
-  **Pollution** – chemicals and fumes inhaled increase free radicals in the body, which further depletes nutrients in the body.

What should I do?

Some vital groups of nutrients and lifestyle choices strengthen our body's own defence systems. They form a series of shields that should form the basis of our positive health care strategy:

Antioxidants fight free radical damage. They include mainly vitamins A, C, E, selenium, and zinc. Foods rich in antioxidants include mainly fruits, vegetables, salads and raw nuts and seeds.

Probiotics is the name given to friendly bacteria that are found in our intestines and help us fight infections and disease. They form the body's defence system against 'intruders'. Long-term medication and antibiotics can kill the friendly bacteria population, therefore lowering the immune system and making us more susceptible to disease.

Increasing intake of fermented foods such live yoghurt can increase these bacteria. There are also probiotics supplements that can be purchased from health food stores.

Fibre is essential for a healthy digestive system and resistance to infection. Fibre is found in wholegrains, bran, fruits and vegetables.

Fats, in the form of essential fatty acids (good fats), form part of every cell in the body; they improve cholesterol ratios, strengthen the overall immune system and help many health conditions from cardiovascular disease to skin and hair problems. These oils are classified as omega 3 and omega 6 polyunsaturated fatty acids; for example, they are found in flaxseeds, walnuts, safflower oil, and fish oils. Do not heat those oils, and always store them in a dark glass container in the fridge.

Exercise - Moderate exercise (20 minutes, 3 times a week) boosts the immune system and stimulates the production of the body's anti-oxidant enzymes.

Help! I'm already sick!

If you are already sick and it is too late to start any preventative methods, try doing the following:

- ◆ Increase your intake of foods rich in vitamins C, E and beta-carotene. These include fruits (especially oranges and kiwis), avocados, red and yellow vegetables, and green leafy vegetables.
- ◆ Increase zinc-rich foods such as raw pumpkin seeds and sunflower seeds
- ◆ Increase your intake of fluids. Drink at least 8-10 glasses of water or more throughout the day.
- ◆ Drink Green Tea or Echinacea Tea
- ◆ Avoid dairy products, sugars, and refined foods such as desserts and white flour products.
- ◆ Decrease caffeine intake
- ◆ Avoid alcohol and smoking
- ◆ Eat regularly and do not skip meals
- ◆ Engage in light exercise such as a walking outdoors

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