

Influencing Immunity

An essay from Lauren's forthcoming book, Restoring Your Immunity

The good news and bad news about immunity is that it can be influenced; influenced to be stronger and more responsive or influenced to be sluggish and downright lazy. If you're like me, you'll appreciate the fact that there are steps within your reach that you can take to make a positive difference. These four factors are directly linked to our immunity:

- Sleep
- Daily movement
- Plant-based diet
- Optimal bowel elimination

Let's take a look at each one and possible actions you could start right away.

Sleep

Without sleep, our body can not heal naturally. Sleep is the single most restorative state for our body. While the amount we each need may vary, a healthy immune system requires consistent sleep.

If you've ever been a parent or a caregiver of someone who regularly interrupts your sleep, you're probably acutely aware of the impact loss of sleep has on your cognitive functions. But what you may not have realized is that this lack of sleep has a direct impact on your immune response. Sleep disruption interrupts circadian rhythms at the cellular level of our immune system. The imbalance it causes can deregulate the immune responses and lead to susceptibility to infectious and inflammatory diseases.

So what about those of you with chronic sleep disturbances? I see this often in my practice, and many of you have come to believe nothing will help. I can understand your hopelessness, and I will tell you this: sleep is not its own entity in the body. It is a necessary state heavily influenced by our adrenal glands, nervous and digestive systems. The root of most insomnia is not poor sleep routines but the function of those glands and systems. I will address this a bit further along down this path we are traveling, but for now, it's enough to know that a regular pattern of uninterrupted sleep supports your immunity; irregular sleep patterns weaken in. If sleep is within your control then take charge and make consistent restful sleep a priority. If you have already tried everything, keeps an open mind – there could be a perspective you haven't considered.

Daily Movement/Exercise

It's widely accepted that daily movement has a positive influence not only on mood and outlook but also a wide range of physical conditions. Individuals who partake in moderate daily exercise will insist they feel healthier but is there a proven correlation between exercise and immunity?

Actually, there is. Research shows that a regular program of moderately intense exercise reduces inflammation and enhances immune responses.

So what does moderate intensity look like?

The answer to that depends on you your current fitness level. For some that can mean a 30-minute walk daily, or 15 minutes on a rebounder. For others, moderate intensity would need to be a 45-minute power yoga course or 30-minute swim. Perhaps you are just starting out, and all of those seem completely out of reach: then 15 minutes of stretching each morning and evening is a wonderful place to begin.

What's important is that you find an activity that you enjoy enough to do it regularly. Committing to go to the gym when it's across town from where you work isn't going to last long. Spend some time thinking this one through. What can you do daily? What can you do if the weather or work schedule gets in the way. Consider all possible obstacles to your success and make contingency plans in advance.

Another note to consider is that extreme workouts don't increase the benefits received. In fact, the opposite may be true as immunity dips during post-workout recovery periods.

Eating a Plant-based Diet

Over the past ten years, there have been great gains in understanding the link between what we eat and how we feel. We've also learned that all the exercise in the world can not make up for a diet that's heavy in animal proteins and processed foods. Regardless of current diet trends, it's indisputable that the consumption of more fruits and vegetables leads to better health. Eating fruits and vegetables in their natural state, either raw or cooked, will provide your body with the most nutrients.

Eating plant-based is not a diet fad but rather a lifestyle of choosing whole fruits and vegetables to play the lead in each meal prepared. How much plant material does it take for a meal to be plant-based? The standard seems to be 80%. However, that's the goal; the place to begin is where you are right now. If you're eating meals that are 10% plants then dial it up week by week. Take a look at each plate of food you serve yourself and begin by filling half of it with whole raw or cooked fruits and vegetables. Each week challenge yourself to push it a bit further.

As you begin to fill that plate up with vegetables you might wonder if some choices are better than others. When it comes

to directly supporting immunity, there happens to be a family of vegetables that are the stars of this show: cruciferous.

Broccoli, Brussels sprouts, kale, cauliflower, and cabbage all contain an important phytonutrient that is transformed by our stomach acid. When transformed it actually provides a frontline defense against intestinal pathogens.

So now that you know about these magic five veggies perhaps you will want to include one each day as you fill up that other side of your plate to attain 80% plant-based meals.

Optimal Bowel Elimination

Did you know that the frequency and consistency of your stool elimination is one of the most telling indicators of your current health? Regardless of what is regular for you, there is an important difference between regular and normal. Under normal conditions, the body was designed to process dietary and metabolic waste product multiple times a day in order to maintain the alkalized state key to healthy cell reproduction and immunity.

When our bodies do not eliminate the dietary and metabolic wastes throughout the day, the tissue of organs and organ systems deteriorate over time, and states of acidosis occur. These states of acidosis can be identified externally quite simply by observing symptoms expressed in our eyes, nose, ears, skin, teeth and hair.

While you likely know what your regular stool pattern is, let me share what is normal. A stool twice and possibly three times daily, in the morning, midday and or evening, is normal and natural. The stool should be fully formed, not break up when flushed, and pass easily without discomfort. You can learn more about stool types from the famous Bristol Stool chart. A #4 stool is optimal, as is a minimum of two complete

stools a day in order to keep the body cleaning at regular intervals.

The first steps in restoring your immunity will involve optimizing your stool elimination. Sleep, exercise, diet and a supportive Gemmotherapy protocol will all play part in this process.

Weakening Immunity

Knowing what weakens immunity is equally important as knowing what strengthens it. While innate immunity takes shape from conception, acquired immunity is another story. Your acquired immunity is influenced by the microbes your body begins to collect from literally everything you come in contact with after birth.

Research in recent years has revealed that within the first three years of life the potential of our acquired immunity is established, Everything you were exposed to (or not exposed to) as a baby and toddler has had an impact on the current state of your immune system. Unfortunately, you cannot undo events that weakened your immunity, but you've just learned what can be done to strengthen what you have.

Here is a collective list of just some of the commonly accepted items that play a role in reducing immunity:

- C-section birth
- Absence of breastfeeding
- Vaccinations
- Antibiotics
- Diet
- Hormone-controlling birth control
- Lack of sleep
- Smoking

- Lack of exercise
- Stress
- Poor bowel elimination
- Environmental toxins such as GMOs and Fluoride

While this list is far from exhaustive, it's based on current research from Dr. Michael Blaser, director of The American Microbiome Project and author of *How the Overuse of Antibiotic is Fueling our Modern Plagues*.

How you were born and nourished during the first few years of your life is not something you can control, but there are dietary and lifestyle changes you can make now that can build up your immunity. Are there items on this list that you can do something about today or soon?

Are there choices you could be making every day in order to support and strengthen the immunity you do have?

YES is the true answer. Some of these steps will make a difference in just weeks, others may take months or years because optimizing organ function to restore immunity, while possible, is no small task.

The path to restoration isn't exactly linear as our body is a network of systems, and improving one part will influence another. So your process at times may feel like a few steps forward and then a few backward or at least to the side, but that is normal.

Regardless, I hope you experience empowerment in realizing that you personally can take action. You might not believe this is possible right now but I am going to guide you through a process that will deepen your self-awareness and encourage you to take your power back in areas you have given away.

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