

What is Immunity?

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

Our immune system and its strength have everything to do with our body's ability to heal itself whether that be a cold or cancer. If we want to stay healthy naturally then the only path is to optimize the function of our immune system. But what really does the immune system do? Simply put, the work of the immune system is to distinguish between what serves as a benefit to your body and what does not. The question that our immune system constantly faces is whether it is more beneficial to negotiate, accept, and integrate an element to diversify and strengthen our microbiota OR to neutralize and eliminate the element because it is likely harmful. Needless to say, our immune system is at work 24/7.

What we experience from the hard work of this system is a thing called "immunity". This immunity is experienced in our physical, mental and emotional bodies. In order to take on the task of restoring immunity on all levels, we must first deepen our understanding of it.

Before my personal health journey began I had very little knowledge in this area and what I did have came from a middle school science lesson. In 7th-grade health class, when not crushing over the entirely gorgeous young Mr. Floyd, I learned that immunity is what keeps me healthy. I also learned that on the flip side it was to blame when I have long flu or a cold-filled winter. As it turns out, there is more to immunity than that. Most importantly is that the lifestyle we adopt can directly influence our immune response to a much greater degree than a packet or two of Emergen-C.

By the end of this essay, should you discover your immunity

could benefit from some fortification, then you will find a path to do just that.

Defining Immunity

Here is a sampling of what you may come across as definitions of immunity.

Webster's Dictionary describes immunity as

A condition of being able to resist a particular disease especially through preventing the development of a pathogenic microorganism.

Wikipedia states that

immunity is a balanced state of multicellular organisms having adequate biological defenses to fight infection, disease, or unwanted biological invasion.

Author and director of the 2018 Real Immunity DocuSeries, Cilla Whatcott Ph.D., shares this:

Your innate health and immunity are what keeps you healthy long-term and prevents chronic disease.

Martin J. Blaser, physician and author of the best-selling book *Missing Microbes*, breaks the definition down into the two types of immunity we possess:

We are born with an innate immunity, a collection of proteins, cells, detergents, and junctions that guard our surfaces based on recognition of structures that are widely shared among classes of microbes.

In contrast, we must develop an adaptive immunity that will clearly distinguish self from non-self. Our early life microbes are the first teachers in this process, instructing the developing immune system about what is dangerous and what is not.

Blaser goes on to explain how critical the early childhood years are in the development of immunity,

By age three each of us has acquired our own unique foundation of microbes. Those first three years, when the resident microbes are most dynamic, are when the baby is developing metabolically, immunologically and neurologically. This critical period lays the foundation for all the biological processes that unfold in our childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age—unless something comes along to disrupt it.

The Immune System at Work

Our immune system keeps itself busy with a host of continuous activity such as:

- Neutralizing pathogens like bacteria, viruses, parasites or fungi that have entered the body, and removing them
- Recognizing and neutralizing harmful substances from the environment
- Fighting against the body's own cells that have changed due to an illness, for example, cancerous cells

I enjoy coaching parents to spot the signs of a healthy or weak immune system at work in their children. When parents learn what to observe in a child at the start of an acute illness they tend to become better observers of their own body and its responses. When a healthy immune system is at work it takes energy from less critical functions. Here are four that are easily identified as they slow or shut down during the healing process:

- One's capacity for problem-solving: mental function
- One's capacity for stress or criticism: emotional function
- One's desire for food: appetite
- One's desire for activity: physical energy

Through the appearance of these symptoms of slowing down non-essential functions the body is asking for our help with these mental, emotional and physical symptoms.

Just as these can be noted at the start of an illness the return to normal function serves as a sign that the work of the immune system was successful. As mental and emotional function restores and appetite and physical energy return, then you know you or your child is improving from whatever acute condition was experienced.

An indication of a weakened immunity in yourself or a child could be any of the following symptoms:

- Prolonged low-grade fever
- Continued loss of appetite
- Continued weakened physical state
- Continued sensitivity to stimulation and interactions with others

What do you recall about the last acute illness you experienced, perhaps a virus or flu?

Can you bring to mind the days preceding?

Can you remember experiencing a lack of mental stamina or feeling emotionally sensitive?

What about a loss of appetite or physical energy?

Have you ever been able to “catch” yourself and slow down at one of these first signs?

While the internal actions of your immune system are not visible, you can learn to become careful observers of the outward signs. Tapping into this awareness is one giant step forward on your personal path to restoring immunity. Choosing and making appropriate choices to support the work of the

immune system will take the courage, creativity, and commitment that I discussed in last week's post, What it takes. What actions you can take to specifically support your immunity will be the topic of upcoming posts.

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