

Get Defensive!

Frequent bouts with viruses and infections may mean your immune system is out of balance.

- **Question:** I am experiencing more bouts of viral and respiratory infections, and with the cold season here I'm concerned. Are there herbs I can take that will help me battle my symptoms or even build my resistance to infection?

V.H., Bat Cave, North Carolina

Answer: If you're suffering from more viruses, respiratory conditions or even bacterial infections than usual, your immune system may be out of balance. You may have either an overreactive immune system or an underreactive one.

There are natural remedies to bring balance back to your immune system, among them: pomegranate, elderberry (fruit extracts) and an herb called astragalus. If your immune system is overreactive these herbs can bring it back into balance. Likewise, if your immune system is underreactive they can bring it back up to par.

In a study examining flu symptoms, researchers found that people taking 100 mg (milligrams) daily of elderberry were able to decrease their symptoms by 50 percent. The elderberry did two things: (1) it inhibited the virus directly; and (2) it stimulated the immune system if the immune system was weakened.

In studies conducted on astragalus, researchers found that subjects taking 100 mg of the herb daily showed an increase in T cell count. Why is this important?

One of the things we look for when studying the immune system is T cell components. The T cell is the commander of the body's immune system because it directs the

natural killer-cells and other cells. Researchers discovered that astragalus increased T cell counts and stimulated a weakened immune system.

Astragalus has also been shown to help boost resistance to infection. By stimulating these T cells, it helps the body overcome both viral and bacterial infections—and it even counters the age-related decline that occurs in the immune system!

As you age, your T cells and natural killer-cells decrease in number. Astragalus (100 mg daily) can overcome that decline.

Finally, in a study on pomegranate, researchers found important implications for breast-cancer treatment. The study showed that 50 mg of pomegranate extract triggers a self-destruction mechanism in breast-cancer cells. Though this study focused on cancer cells, it also showed that pomegranate battles infections.

So if you are contracting more viruses and infections than usual, you can bring your immune system into balance. God has provided us with remedies in His plant kingdom to do that.

- **Question: I have borderline high cholesterol. I'm not taking any medications yet, but I'm concerned that I might have to. I hear that psyllium, the same kind in Metamucil, can actually help lower my cholesterol. Is this right?**

M.S., Lebanon, Kansas

Answer: Psyllium is a water-soluble fiber. Essentially, it extracts bile acids from the body, preventing the reabsorption of bile, which consists primarily of cholesterol. As bile acids exit the body, cholesterol also exits the body, causing the blood levels to drop.

Coronary heart disease accounts for one in three deaths in the United States (about 600,000 annually). Blood cholesterol levels have a major role in this process.

In fact, the risk of a heart attack increases 2.5 percent to 3 percent for every 1 percent increase in cholesterol level. That also means for every 1 percent reduction you achieve in your cholesterol you will reduce your risk of a heart attack by 2.5 percent to 3 percent!

Studies have shown that consuming psyllium daily (in the form of a cereal or taking it twice daily as a supplement) can lower cholesterol levels, in particular the bad LDL cholesterol, as well as dramatically reduce your risk of a heart attack.

A supplement taken twice a day can produce up to a 15 percent reduction in heart-attack risk!

Some 60 million Americans need treatment for high blood-cholesterol. Most of them are taking commonly prescribed "statin drugs." These medications can definitely save lives in many cases, but why not try a natural approach first?