

Nurturing Your Immune System

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- Homeostasis is the concept that describes the human body's amazing physiological processes that maintain a stable internal environment. Immunity is an expression of homeostasis.
- Nurturing the immune system is preventative medicine. Balance and harmony, in all aspects – body, mind and soul, are important.
- Quality nutrition is essential. The body needs to be nourished with a variety of whole foods so it can renew itself in a way that ensures health. This can take many different forms depending on personal needs and preferences.
- It is important to address structural factors through appropriate exercise, dance or any enjoyable expression of bodily vitality. Stay mobile in a way that suits your individual needs.
- Emotional and mental factors need attention as well. When these factors are considered and addressed then inner harmony can be established. Positive thought, personal vision and self-love feed the body in numerous ways.
- A whole body approach is crucial to nurturing your immune system. Herbs are certainly great allies to increase strength and vitality but lifestyle choices are the foundation for strong immunity.

The term immune system is applied to structures and processes that are involved in defeating the attempts of environmental forces to overrun, destroy or gain control of any part of our body.¹ Herbs are important tools to strengthen your immune system's efficacy to stand up to these environmental forces that can be overwhelming at times. With a whole body approach in mind, general detoxification and elimination must be taken into account when looking at the immune system. Therefore, some herbs that are great for the immune system are well known for cleansing and eliminating wastes from the body.

Renowned herbalist, Christopher Hobbs, has identified three relevant levels of herbal activity when it comes to the immune system:

- Deep immune activation
- Surface immune activation
- Adaptogenic action or hormonal modulation

These categories provide some insight as to when to use the specific herbs that fall into these groupings. Herbs have a variety of constituents that can be highlighted as the active ingredients that drive the process however it is important to remember that herbs act as biological wholes not just as individual constituents.

Deep Immune Activation

¹ Herbal Tonic Therapies. Daniel B. Mowrey, Ph.D.

These plants impact the immune system within the tissues and the lymph to help create a strong foundation that supports whole body function.

Astragalus ([Astragalus membranaceus](#))

Codonopsis ([Codonopsis tangshen](#))

Reishi mushroom ([Ganoderma lucidum](#))

Shiitake mushroom ([Lentinus edodes](#))

Schizandra ([Schisandra chinensis](#))

Burdock ([Arctium lappa](#))

Nettles ([Urtica dioica](#))

Red Clover ([Trifolium pratense](#))

Turmeric ([Curcuma longa](#))

Surface Immune Activation

These plants are known as antimicrobials or immune system boosters. They effectively address infection and enhance the immune system response.

Echinacea ([Echinacea spp.](#))

Garlic ([Allium sativum](#))

Calendula ([Calendula officinalis](#))

Cedar ([Thuja occidentalis](#))

Thyme ([Thymus spp.](#))

Myrrh ([Commiphora molmol](#))

Wild Indigo ([Baptisia tinctoria](#))

Usnea ([Usnea spp.](#))

Oregano ([Origanum vulgare](#))

Adaptogenic Action or Hormonal Modulators

These plants help raise the body's ability to deal with the stresses of daily life. They offer balance and nourishment by working through hormonal modulation of the immune response. They also help increase vitality and longevity.

Licorice ([Glycyrrhiza glabra](#))

Siberian ginseng ([Eleutherococcus senticosus](#))

Ginseng: Chinese, American* ([Panax ginseng](#), [Panax quinquefolium](#)*)

*Note: American ginseng is seriously stressed in its native habitat due to overharvesting and habitat loss. Please support the organic farmers who are growing it and let the wild plants be.

Rhodiola ([Rhodiola rosea](#))

Dandelion root ([Taraxacum officinale](#))

Hawthorn berry ([Crataegus spp.](#))

Gingko ([Gingko biloba](#))

The wonderful thing about these plants is that they are so versatile. Some of the aforementioned herbs would not be thought of as immune system herbs because they are so known for being specific for other bodily systems or organs (Hawthorn – cardiovascular, Dandelion and Burdock – liver, Calendula – skin).

However, the immune system helps to support the whole body by being the defensive line that protects the precious components of the entire organism.

Some Simple Steps to Using Herbs

Making Tea:

For leaves, flowers, berries and soft buds you make an infusion. Boil water and add to your herb(s) of choice (1 Tbs. dried herb/cup of water or 2 Tbs. fresh herb/cup of water) then let the mixture steep with a lid on it for 10-20 minutes. Strain and enjoy with honey or plain and simple.

For roots, seeds, barks and hard buds you make a decoction. Put herb(s) in a pot with water and a lid then bring to a boil and turn down heat to let it gently simmer for 10-20 minutes. Strain and enjoy the tea.

Making Soup:

When you are making a soup broth with onions, carrots, celery, etc. include some astragalus root, burdock root, reishi mushroom, etc. to make a hearty broth that nourishes the whole body. Once the broth is made and you are adding other ingredients then include plants like nettles, oregano, dandelion leaf, fresh pressed garlic, etc. to make the soup not only delicious but super nutritious and immune enhancing.

Making Rice:

When you are making rice, include some herbs (fresh or dried) to add their flavor and to support the immune system. Some great choices would be turmeric (a little goes a long way), thyme, calendula, shiitake mushroom, etc. When the rice is cooked, stir to mix the herbs in further and eat with your food of choice.

Making Honey:

Take fresh herbs (sliced astragalus root, sliced Echinacea root or fresh flowers, calendula flowers, hawthorn berries, etc.) and place them in a pint sized mason jar. Fill the jar $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ full with herbs then cover them with slightly warmed honey. Place lid on the jar and let it sit in a cupboard or pantry for at least two weeks before using the medicinal honey. You can also use dried herbs, powder them and then mix them into the honey. This honey can be used immediately.

Making Sprinkles:

Grind up dried herbs (oregano, thyme, calendula, turmeric, garlic, nettles, etc.) to make sprinkles for a variety of dishes. Experimenting with mixtures is fun and adds a lot of nutritional value to your food.

Recipes to Support the Immune System

Nourish Me Tea – 1 part nettles, 1 part alfalfa, ½ part oat tops, ½ part red clover blossoms, ¼ part rose hips and ¼ part peppermint. Make an infusion. This is a tonic tea that can be enjoyed every day and is high in vitamins and minerals.

Immune Enhancing Tea – 1 part astragalus root, ½ part calendula flowers, ½ part chamomile flowers, ¼ part licorice root and ¼ part hibiscus flowers. Decoct the astragalus and licorice in a covered pot for 10 – 15 minutes, turn the heat off and then add the rest of the herbs and let the mixture steep covered for another 10-15 minutes before straining the herbs out. This tea will support your immune system deeply and can be alternated with the Nourish Me Tea.

Green Drink – Several fresh young plantain leaves, dandelion leaves, chickweed and peppermint. Cover with good water and blend well. Strain and enjoy. This can be diluted with ½ pineapple or apple juice. This drink is not only tasty but is high in vitamins and minerals. It also helps with liver function and allergies.

Rosemary's Super Immunity Syrup – 2 parts oat tops, 1 part astragalus, 1 part burdock and 1 part Echinacea root and tops. Add 2 oz. of the herb mixture to 1 quart cold water. Over low heat, simmer liquid down to 1 pint. You'll get a very concentrated, thick tea. Strain the herbs out. Pour liquid back in the pot. To each pint of liquid, add 1 cup of honey. Warm honey and liquid together just enough to mix well; this will keep the enzymes in the honey. Remove from heat and put in a bottle. Can add to a fruit concentrate or add a small amount of brandy to preserve. This syrup will last for several weeks or months if it is refrigerated especially with the brandy in it.

Strong Immunity Soup – Make a vegetable broth (or chicken broth if you prefer) with onions, garlic, celery, carrots, beets, ginger, burdock root, astragalus root, dandelion root, shiitake mushrooms, thyme, oregano, rosemary and sea vegetables of your choice. When the broth has been simmered into a nourishing concoction, add nettles, dandelion greens and other greens like kale, mustard greens, etc. and let the greens infuse into the soup. Before serving, stir in some miso paste and some fresh ground black pepper (if you wish) and then enjoy!

Immune Sprinkle – ¾ cup of lightly toasted sesame seeds, 2 cups dried nettle leaf, ½ dried thyme, ½ cup dried oregano, 6 Tbs. dried rosemary, 6 Tbs. dried kelp and 1 tsp. garlic granules or sea salt. Powder the ingredients, blend and enjoy on popcorn, toast, in soups, salads, sauces, main dishes, etc. This sprinkle is not only strengthening to the immune system and high in vitamins and minerals but it also tastes great and lends itself well to many different foods. It is especially helpful when traveling.

References:

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Mowrey, David B. Herbal Tonic Therapies. 1993. Keats Publishing, Inc.