

Self Care for your Immune System - Dr. Victoria Shaw

Prioritize sleep. This takes conscious, consistent attention.

Sleep is essential for your brain and body to recover from the day's assaults. Your immune system depends on this time to repair, reorganize, reboot, and restore. If you have difficulty sleeping there are many strategies to explore, and we'll cover those in a separate module. Aim for 8 hours every night; naps are great! If you have a tracker of some kind (Fitbit, Apple watch, Oura ring etc) pay attention to how much deep sleep you're getting ~ this is where a lot of healing happens; work to increase it if necessary.

Be time-wise and start downshifting at sunset, turn bright lights off, move into quieter rhythms and activities. No screens past 8-9PM, but if you must use them, wear blue blocking amber shades. Turn off wifi at night, leave your phone in another room and on airplane mode, move small electronics and other sources of EMFs away from your bed. Sleep in a very dark and fairly cool environment, and while in bed, nothing but sleep and sex! Try and be in bed by 10PM every night, and no food past 6-7PM so your body can take full advantage of recovery mode. Learn Yoga Nidra so you have at least one reliable nighttime practice to help take you into deep sleep.

Appropriate movement. Every day.

We're made to move. Don't sit for longer than 25 minutes at a time; after that, get up and do a few minutes of movement ~ a yoga posture or two, a few calisthenics, walk around the house or office, but get some movement 'snacks' a couple of times every hour. This is in addition to whatever other formal 'exercise' you do. Speaking of which, heavy and high exertion activities aren't always the best. Something like yoga, tai chi, qigong, gentle rebounding and just easy walking can be sustainable throughout life and aren't as taxing on your adrenals as heavy cross-fit type workouts or running hard over long distances can be.

Get outside in the fresh air and sunshine.

We evolved outdoors, and all our biology is synched up with nature's rhythms. We need the sunlight to make Vitamin D, which is key for super immunity. Also, morning light is essential to re-set your circadian rhythm after a good night's sleep. Taking a 20 minute walk outside every day will accomplish many health positive goals, including putting you in touch with the changing seasons, which help remind us that we, too are part of nature and changing with time. Establish an outdoor ritual that calls to you ~ connect with the trees and plants in your neighborhood, greet the day in all 4 directions and all 4 elements, take a mindful wonder walk, open your eyes and heart and take it in deeply. Every moment is brand new.

Eat a real, whole food, high nutrient diet.

That means something like ancestral nutrition or what your great grandparents ate, in other words, no processed foods (including sugar, artificial sweeteners, caffeine, alcohol, flours, packaged, boxed and canned things) and no eating around the clock. The body needs time away from food to digest, repair and recycle. Various forms of fasting, time restricted eating, and doing an occasional weekend mono-meal (e.g. apples only) can be wonderful for the immune, and many other, systems. This ideal diet should contain ample healthy fats from plants (avocado, olives, nuts and seeds, etc) and animals (grass fed, pasture raised, wild caught, where no hormones and antibiotics have been used), homemade bone broths, plenty of herbs and spices, and fermented foods. A majority of our food should come from the colorful rainbow of veggies and fruits that are available seasonally. Lastly, eat your food with gratitude for whatever life offered itself to you ~ this will connect you more consciously with the vast web of life in ways that are healing for all kinds of problems.

Treat daily stress with daily practices.

Learn to strike a balance between the Fight or Flight and Rest and Digest sides of your nervous system. Short term bursts of high cortisol/stress hormones from the sympathetic nervous system used for survival can be helpful for meeting pressing deadlines or giving you the energy to get through a mini-crisis. But once those demands have passed, you need to have effective, reliable and consistently practiced methods for coming back into the parasympathetic Rest and Digest mode. You could combine a stress busting mini practice with your movement break every 25 minutes throughout the day ~ this way, the stress won't accumulate. Quickest path from stressed to chill is probably 5 deep breaths while you're really present in your body and feeling the immediate effects of letting go. This can take some practice! There are likely thousands, if not more, of techniques for coming into the present moment and letting go of stress and tension; find what speaks to you, become a ninja at those and do them EVERY DAY.

Tend to your gut health

Most of our immune system resides in and around our gut. Many modern humans have some degree of enhanced intestinal permeability (leaky gut) and dysbiosis, or imbalances in the gut microbiome. This can diminish your immune response to incoming germs, cause you to feel sluggish and expose you to unwanted toxins your body then has to struggle to eliminate. Cleaning up the diet (eliminating foods that are inflammatory like gluten, dairy, soy, corn, sugar etc.) can go a long way to improving gut health, but you may also struggle with other issues that could benefit from extra TLC.

Don't be constipated ~ your detoxification system depends on daily bowel elimination that should be easy to pass. If this isn't happening, take care of it! Adequate hydration, supplemental magnesium and getting rid of foods you're sensitive to can all help here. Probiotics are usually a good idea, as is a periodic cleanse once or twice a year to re-balance things and, again, fasting is a nice gut soothing activity ~ even 13-16 hours/day can be enough to let everything rest and re-set.

Specific foods and nutrients

Many specific substances help boost the immune system in a variety of ways. Food sources of some of these nutrients are the following: salmon, sardines, other small fish, onions, dark leafy greens, garlic, colorful bell peppers, berries of all kinds, lemons and other citrus fruits, egg yolks, cod liver oil, butter, kim chi, sauerkraut, miso, garlic, oats, mushrooms (especially the beta glucan in medicinal mushrooms like chaga, lion's mane, turkey tail, cordyceps, maitake, reishi, shiitake). Vitamins A, B6, C (with flavonoids and phytonutrients especially), D3, and E are all necessary for immune function. Zinc and Selenium are minerals that also help with immunity. Colloidal Silver, Olive Leaf and essential oils (eucalyptus, oregano, frankincense, thyme, tea tree, Scots Pine, rosemary, niaouli, palmarosa, lemon) can also be wonderful for boosting the immune system. With essential oils, always use organic if you can as the oils are the most concentrated form of the plant. Use proper safety for all supplements, oils and other treatments, investigate first!

Final thoughts

Avoid smoke and other inhaled irritants in all forms (synthetic fragrance, household chemicals, etc.) as this can make your nasal, oral and bronchial membranes more vulnerable to damage and infection.

Hormesis ~ this is the limited exposure to some kind of stressor that makes us stronger. One of the easiest ways to provide hormesis is to get alternating hot and cold stress while in the shower. Other activities like yogic breathing and doing walking breath holds, alternating sauna with cold immersion and other systems stressors that you build up over time can be very effective at increasing tolerance, resilience and stress hardness.

Explore a variety of self healing methods to keep yourself well ~ everything from flower remedies to yoga, music therapy to self hypnosis and many other techniques can make you feel grounded, relaxed and happy and thereby contribute to your overall immunity and well being.

Cultivate a generous, receptive, positive attitude toward life ~ yours and all the life around you. Find things you love and spend more time doing those things. Appreciate the people in your circles of connection. Practice gratitude, mindfulness, forgiveness and compassion, especially toward yourself. Realize how short this life is and what a gift it truly is to be here on the Earth. All these things will make your body, mind and spirit more resilient against all the difficulties and challenges we face, including threats to our immunity, but much more important is that it will lead to your deep happiness and joy so you can contribute your radiant goodness in this world.