

Health Notes

The Flu & You

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We have all heard it by now; there is a shortage of the flu vaccine this year. The reason is of course that half our country's vaccine supply comes from Great Britain where production has been shut down due to quality control issues. The near-hysteria caused by the shortage is being fueled by the media. The television news programs have done their part by filming hundreds of people waiting in long lines at department stores for a limited supply of flu shots. These are lines of desperate people wondering why a department store can get the precious vaccine and their doctors cannot. Good question!

The flu shot is important to high-risk individuals whose lives may be in jeopardy should they contract the flu. Ask your medical doctor if you are at high risk. While the flu shot is given for defense against the flu, there are many things you can do to minimize the effects of the flu and maybe even prevent you from contracting it to begin with.

Good, simple hygiene principles preserve health and prevent disease. Something as simple as washing your hands often is a great start. Hands should be washed after touching anything the public has touched. Have your children wash their hands as soon as they walk in the door from school; they are carrying every germ their friends have to offer on those grubby little hands. Don't forget to wash hands before eating, too. Also try not to rub your eyes or nose with dirty hands, as these are the areas where many viruses find their way into our bodies.

While the flu shot in theory helps your immune system function better, studies point to the ability of manipulating dietary intake to enhance the immune response. There are some investigators who have associated sugar and a high fat diet with depressing the immune system. Proper dietary intake of vitamins and minerals provide our body with the fuel it needs to function daily. We often supplement when we feel our diet lacks the desired nutrient value. Be careful... research shows that mega-doses of vitamin and mineral supplements can cause depression of immune system rather than helping it. Even if

you don't agree that these measures can help your immune system, you must admit that they won't hurt you.

Moderate exercise on a regular basis has proven to boost the function of the immune mechanisms and the body's resistance to insult or injury. Furthermore, activity appears to reverse the decline in immune function that often accompanies aging. Studies have shown that women in their 70s who maintain a moderate exercise regimen have an immune system that is over 50% more efficient than women of the same age with a sedentary lifestyle. They also have an immune system response similar to women half their age. However, people who participate in extremely intense exercise may actually weaken their immune system.

Discuss with your medical doctor if you are at high risk and a candidate for the flu vaccine. Take responsibility for your own health and follow these guidelines. These few common sense steps will put you in the best position to allow your body's own defenses to fight off the flu this season. ☆

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