

### **Hawkes Bay Today Vital Signs Column, April 2012.**

We often only think about our immune systems when we become sick. Then we hope our bodies will bounce back immediately, thankfully, most bodies do. For great health through the year and quicker recovery, eat a diet rich in fresh fruits and vegetables, lean meat and fish. Consider taking a pre or probiotic to absorb nutrients from your food and fight harmful bacteria and infections. Eat foods rich in zinc (fish), vitamin C (fruit and vegetables), garlic and honey to boost your immunity.

With these measures in place, and winter looming, here are a few simple ideas to help prepare your body for the colder months. Buccaline is an anti-bacterial treatment that helps protect against the complications of colds and supports the immune system. It is safe for everyone from young children to the very elderly. The three day course of tablets is taken while you are well and repeated after three months. Ask your pharmacist if Buccaline is right for you. Buccaline is quite different to the flu vaccine and is not intended as an alternative to it.

The flu vaccine works by preparing your immune system to fight disease by taking advantage of the fact the immune system can 'remember' infectious organisms. The flu vaccine is free for many people, talk to your Doctor to see if you qualify.

Specific vitamins and minerals can be used to boost your immune system and prevent viruses taking hold in the body. Vitamin A, C, Selenium and Zinc may be helpful in reducing the intensity and duration of winter colds. Vitamin A can be helpful as it appears to interfere with the way in which viruses replicate, while Vitamin C may help by stimulating the body's immune response and if an infection still does take hold, it may reduce the duration and severity of the symptoms. Selenium and Zinc are also thought to be very helpful for a healthy immune response.

Foods rich in Vitamin A, C, and E include carrots, tomatoes, spinach, broccoli, capsicums, oranges, lemons, limes, grapefruit, avocados, nuts, corn and sunflower seeds. Garlic also contains powerful anti-viral properties and mushrooms may naturally boost our immune system. Products like Vir-Defence from GO Healthy are designed to support recovery from winter ills and chills. They support a strong immune system and the body's defences to deal with winter threats.

If those nasty bugs still find their way through your protective barrier, ease your symptoms with rest and drinking at least eight glasses of fluid a day. Fruit juice high in vitamin C may be a great way to boost your energy, keep you hydrated and rid your system of toxins. Hot water with lemon and honey is particularly soothing. Make sure you avoid alcohol, caffeine and milk. Eating easily digested foods such as vegetable broth or chicken soup will ensure you get nutrients into your system.

Medicines can be helpful to relieve the symptoms of a blocked nose, sore throat and cough. Paracetamol or Ibuprofen may be used to bring down fevers. Inhalants such as friars balsam or menthol & eucalyptus can help clear the nose. The inhalant should be added to hot, not boiling water in a metal bowl. Place a towel over your head, close your eyes and inhale the vapour. Try aloe vera tissues or barrier creams on the nose to soothe sore, dry skin.

Anti viral medicine Tamiflu attacks the flu virus stopping it from spreading further inside the body, therefore reducing its severity and duration. It needs to be started within 48 hours of the first symptoms of influenza.

See your doctor if you are not better within four days, especially if you have sore ears, cough up green or thick yellow mucus, have pain in the chest, trouble breathing or have other chronic health problems. A child with symptoms such as a very sore throat, vomiting, high fever, blotchy rash, stiff neck, joint or muscle pains, aversion to light, a strange high-pitched cry, extreme lethargy or irritability should be taken to the doctor immediately.