

Special Topic - "Swine Flu"

Greetings Family and Friends!!

Due to the recent scare over swine flu, I thought it'd be appropriate to share information that may be appropriate and useful and will hopefully answer a few questions.

When I first heard about the swine flu, I actually almost bought into the scare (you know??... the media is a powerful beast!!) Then I asked myself, and several friends, what is the difference between this 'Swine Flu' and any other flu. The answer that I continuously got?? "Not very much!"

INFLUENZA – the 'flu' – is an acute, commonly epidemic disease, caused by numerous rapidly mutating viral strains and characterized by respiratory symptoms and general malaise and fatigue. The flu generally occurs during the winter months (when people tend to spend more time indoors) and can range in strength from mild (feeling like a bad cold) to severe (incapacitating or even deadly). I found in my research that in the US, the flu kills over 36,000 people every year and that it is most severe on infants, the elderly, the debilitated and some of those with chronic diseases [the populations with the weakest immune systems]. It commonly occurs in areas that are 'industrialized', those areas where people are in very close proximity to one another for many hours a day - like office buildings, daycares, prisons, etc. Flu is one of the leading causes of death in the US.

By their very nature, viruses constantly mutate and evolve (this is the reason why the flu vaccine that is produced and given each year may or may not prevent you from getting sick during flu season!) It naturally occurs in human, bird, horse, and pig hosts and can spread between most of these hosts. Viral strains may evolve characteristics that make them more or less lethal to humans, give them more or less ease of transmission and mortality from season to season. Because of this, the major concern of public health authorities is that a strain with unusual strength and ease of transmission will develop and severely effect more people worldwide causing widespread social and economic disruption.

SO, WHAT CAN YOU DO?

There are everyday actions that you can take to stay healthy. These are the suggestions given by the CDC and other health authorities:

1. **Cover your nose and mouth** with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Then throw the tissue in the trash after you use it
2. **WASH YOUR HANDS!** – washing often with soap and water will do a lot to prevent you from spreading disease to yourself and others. You don't necessarily need special antibacterial soap or any other chemicals. The simple act of washing will greatly decrease transmission. If soap and water aren't available, sanitizing hand gel can work.
3. **Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.** Infection can spread easily this way.
4. **If you feel sick, REST!** – Not only does this decrease spreading it to other people, but it also increases your chances for a **FULL** recovery and lessens your chances of developing further consequences later. If you happen to get sick, give yourself a day or two after you start to feel better before you go back to your daily routine!

Those were the everyday (shall I say 'common sense') actions you can take in order to prevent infection. There are some diet and lifestyle modifications you can also make. In order to decrease your chances of catching the flu, or any other contagious illness for that matter, you can:

Lifestyle

- ☺ **Get outside and BREATHE!!** Get fresh air daily. Decrease your exposure to the recirculated air that everyone else has been breathing. Give your lungs a break by opening the windows and doors to your home, car, and office for several hours each day, or as long as is possible. Sit outside and take a few deep breaths. Smell the roses!
- ☺ **Get outside and get some SUN!!** By getting in the SUN, you increase your body's natural production of Vitamin D – a vitamin that most of us are deficient in (even here in the desert), especially since long gone are the days where people work outside in fields, and children play on the playgrounds and in yards for hours at a time. Studies have shown that low blood levels of vitamin D can, among other things, decrease your body's

resistance to disease allowing you to be sicker more often. Remember that flu season occurs when people tend to stay inside most

- ☺ **RELAX!!!** Stress decreases the strength of your immune system. This is why people tend to get sick during and after stressful deadlines and events. People also ‘worry themselves sick’. By relaxing, you allow your body to re-set and re-build its immunity. Do things like deep breathing exercises, take a 5 minute ‘vacation’ a few times a day and escape to your favorite place, rent a comedy and laugh until your sides hurt. It’s not hard... REALLY!
- ☺ **Get some sleep!!** Sleep is when your body does the most growth (this is why children always seem to grow overnight... because they do!) and repair. When you get adequate amounts of rest each night, 7-9 hrs, in a completely dark environment, you allow your body to repair from the previous day and get ready for the next day. You also build your body’s defenses!

Dietary

- ☺ **Get colorful:** By increasing the amount of different color fresh fruits and veggies that you eat, you get the most nutrients that your food has to offer. You also give your body more of what it needs to keep you healthy including antioxidants, phytonutrients, and bioflavonoids among other things. An apple-a-day may really keep the doctor away after all!!
- ☺ **Take your vitamins:** Simple measures like making sure to take your multivitamins and vitamin C (which you can also get by just eating fresh citrus fruit on a regular basis) can help keep you healthy
- ☺ NOTE: remember **Cod Liver Oil??** Your mother, grandmother, or great-grandmother may have made you take it as a child. Well, we should revisit her infinite wisdom! Cod liver oil is a natural source of Vitamin D (see above) and Vitamin A, two vitamins that are essential in boosting the immune system. It is also a great anti-inflammatory, which is the basis of most disease processes. 1-2 tablespoons a day will increase your immunity.
- ☺ **Lay off the sweets!!** It is a proven fact that within minutes of eating a tablespoon of sugar, your body’s immune cells decrease function and can actually stop working. This effect **CAN LAST FOR OVER 5 HOURS** depending on how much sugar you take in. So, instead of snacking on the sugary sweet or bready foods, try something that is more helpful to your body. OR... drink some water. You may actually be more thirsty than hungry.

By following these 8 simple suggestions, you can decrease your chances of getting ill, as well as decreasing the amount of time and severity of illness if you still happen to get sick.

So go outside and breathe, take a walk, eat your apples and oranges, take your cod liver oil, and relax. Smell the roses. Read a book. Send the kids to their friend’s house. Take a personal day from your daily life. Get some sleep... and BE HAPPY!!!

Some of the information was taken from the following sources:

- ♥ *Medical Herbalism* by Paul Bergner
- ♥ Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary
- ♥ From www.cdc.gov/swineflu
- ♥ Carolina’s Natural Healthcare newsletter

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Until next time... Peace and Health

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