

EXPLORING A NEW ERA OF IMMUNE BOOSTER

by Carson B. Burgstiner, M.D.

Effects of Diet and Exercise

Although the connection between diet and immunity is still controversial, many studies indicate the link is real. A research team at the American Health Foundation in New York City found that reducing fat consumption to 25 percent (from 40 percent) of total calories increased the activity of NK cells by 49 percent. These are the cells that attack viruses and incipient cancers.

A number of animal and human studies show vitamin C can also help increase the immune system's ability to fight infection. Vitamin E supplementation in people 60 and older increases immune system responsiveness, according to nutritionist Jeffrey Blumberg, Ph.D., of the USDA's Human Research Center on Aging at Tufts University in Boston. Immunologist Adrienne Benedick, Ph.D. of the pharmaceutical giant, Hoffman_La Roche, tested vitamin E on rats. "Vitamin E is the most important immune stimulant I have seen." Benedick said.

The immune system is also nourished by regular exercise. David Neiman, Ph.D. and a research team at Loma Linda University in California showed that exercise seems to prime the immune system for action. The Institute for Aerobics in Dallas did an eight_year study of 10,000 men and 3,000 women. They found that people who walked briskly for half an hour every day, or an equivalent exercise, were less likely to die of cancer. Moderation appears to be the key in exercise.

Effects of Mental Attitude

Mental attitude also influences health. There is a biochemical connection between the brain and immune system. In 1976, Nicholas Plotnikoff, Ph.D. of Oral Roberts University, found that certain types of immune cells had receptors for endorphins_natural, opium_like substances produced by the brain. Monocytes and macrophages have receptors for virtually every known messenger chemical or neurotransmitter produced by the brain.

ACTH, supposedly an exclusive product of the brains pituitary gland, is also manufactured by immune system cells, according to J. Edwin Blalock, Ph.D. Candace Pert, Ph.D. and Michael Ruff, Ph.D of the National Institute of Mental Health, found that glia cells in the brain had receptors for molecules produced by the immune system.

Promise of a Longer Healthier Life

Altering immune system cells in the laboratory to increase their effectiveness holds great promise in the treatment of cancer. More important, taking thymosins in a preventive way beginning in the 20s or 30s can stimulate the immune system and significantly prolong and increase our health in general. A healthful, anti_oxidant_rich diet and a lifelong commitment to regular exercise further strengthens immune function.

A recent eight_year, multi_center study linked atherosclerosis within blood vessel walls with immune system failure. Most longevity studies reveal that life extension depends on cell regeneration, which depends on an intact immune system. An intact immune system depends, in return, on thymus gland support and healthy lifestyle choices.

No question about it; we are standing on the threshold of a new era in health care. It's an exciting time, with limitless possibilities.

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Carson B Burgstiner, M.D., was a board_certified gynecologist/obstetrician in Savannah, Georgia. Dr. Burgstiner was a past president of the Medical Association of Georgia and served as vice_chairman of the AMA's Georgia Delegation. He was also a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons and of the American College of Preventive Medicine.