LIFESTYLE CHANGES IN AUTOIMMUNE DISEASE

How Lifestyle Changes Can Improve Immune System Health

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Studies show that simple lifestyle changes can help improve immune system health.

Living with an Autoimmune Disorder

People with autoimmune disorders often hear how lifestyle changes can aid the healing process. However, the idea of making lifestyle changes can seem overwhelming at first, especially to someone who is trying to rush to multiple doctor appointments, deal with an array of unwelcome new symptoms, and pay for an assortment of new prescription drugs.

But in restoring or improving immune system health, beneficial lifestyle changes needn't be overwhelming. Lifestyle changes range from simply adding more fresh fruit to one's diet to replacing chemical cleaning agents with natural products such as vinegar and baking soda. The immune system in good health is a diverse group of organs and cells that work harmoniously together to protect us from diseases and malignancies.

Immune System Health

The immune system is healthiest when it's getting its regular exercise by working as intended and when it's not overloaded with toxins and stressors. Similar to the needs of all of our body's cells, our immune system cells have simple maintenance needs; they rely on pure water, fresh air, regular exercise, and a nutrient-rich diet. Lifestyle changes used to benefit people with autoimmune disorders are similarly simple.

Diet and Supplements

One of the most significant lifestyle changes someone with an autoimmune disorder can make is improving their diet. By relying on the top immunity boosters I described in a recent blog and avoiding processed foods, artificial sweeteners, sugar, saturated fats and known or suspected food allergens, the immune system cells function at their best.

Sugar and saturated fats promote inflammation and artificial sweeteners contain chemicals potentially damaging to the immune system. Dietary supplements containing antioxidant vitamins and minerals are also necessary for immune health because of the increased nutritional demands required during the healing process. Supplements containing CoQ-10, alpha lipoic acid, acetyl-l-carnithine, quercetin, bromelain, and essential oils, particularly omega-3 oils such as flaxseed or evening primrose oil, and vitamins C, E, A, D, K and B complex help maintain and support the immune system.
Exercise

Exercise is another key factor in immune system health. Simply staying active by walking for 30 minutes every day or practicing light aerobics, yoga or tai chi is adequate. In fact, strenuous exercise is not recommended because over-exercising can suppress the immune system and act as a stressor or trigger for autoimmune disease.

However, light exercise helps by stimulating the circulation and encouraging the flow of lymph fluid through the body. Exercise also improves the oxygen supply of tissue and immune system cells. Exercise also reduces stress, stimulates a good appetite and helps reduce inflammation.

Emotional Health

Emotional health is also important for maintaining good health. Adoring pets, good friends, and supportive family members help us maintain a positive attitude. A good social network is also important and support groups, whether online or local, are excellent educational and support resources. It's important, however, to not make an autoimmune disease the central focus of one's life.

Patients newly diagnosed with an autoimmune disorder often rely on support groups to help them understand more about their disorder and to learn practical ways to deal with the changes. Regularly checking in with questions or to help others offers numerous benefits and helps patients feel connected. The danger lies in making the disease more important than life itself, that is, not getting adequate rest or exercise because too much time is spent online.

Adequate Rest

Getting adequate sleep and rest is another often overlooked lifestyle change that affects immune system health. Studies show that most people with autoimmune disorders benefit from 8-9 hours of restful sleep each night. Sleep deprivation interferes with healing in many ways including its detrimental effect on our emotional health. Meditation and relaxation also offer benefits for immune system health.

Sunlight

Adequate exposure to natural sunlight is also important for immune system health. Several major studies show that a deficiency of vitamin D associated with decreased exposure to sunlight is linked to the development of several different autoimmune disorders, including multiple sclerosis and autoimmune thyroid disorders.

Avoiding Toxins
Chemical toxins injure our immune system. Avoiding chemical cleaning agents, recreational drugs, cigarette smoke, industrial toxins, air pollution, and unnecessary vaccines and antibiotics allow our immune systems to heal.

**Humor and Joy**

Laughter, a positive attitude, and enjoying one's overall life all affect immune system health. Touch is another important factor in healing. Studies show the benefits of holding hands with loved ones or employing touch therapy particularly reiki.

Animals in controlled cancer-stimulating studies who were regularly petted resisted cancer because of their improved immune system health. Studies of humor show that the simple act of smiling improves the function of our immune system's cells. And even though incorporating lifestyle changes can seem overwhelming in addition to the many other demands caused by an autoimmune disorder, it takes no extra time to smile.

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