

# Holistic Health: Stopping Sickness at Its Roots

BY JACQUELYN DOBRINSKA

Fall is in the air! As the beauty of the Blue Ridge Mountains explodes with colors of red, gold, and orange, this change in seasons can bring an unwelcome guest—sickness. Colds and flu thrive when temperatures drop and people come into more frequent contact with one another.

This happens each fall as we start spending more time indoors. Yet, not everyone who is exposed gets sick. The difference lies in the soil. No, not in the dirt of the mountains, but rather in the “ecosystem” of our immune system. If disease is a seed, it only takes root if the conditions are just right.

Our immunity’s “ecosystem” is complex. Levels of immunity are working every single moment, distinguishing “self” from “other.” We tend to only notice the process when we experience symptoms of fever, mucus, or inflammation used to destroy the unwanted visitors. These symptoms, usually unpleasant at best, are also important allies to restoring health. (Check out next month’s article on this topic.)

To avoid sickness altogether, it’s important to maintain a healthy immune ecosystem by paying attention to the foundations of health. This fall, try natural approaches to boost immune function.

**Improve digestion.** Immunity and digestion are intricately tied together. Stomach acid and the intestinal wall act as important barriers to pathogens. Poor eating habits can alter acidity, allowing pathogens to pass into the lower gastrointestinal tract. These same habits can also create microscopic holes in the intestinal lining, which may allow pathogens into the blood stream. To improve digestion, eat whole unprocessed foods, and presoak vegetables, beans, grains, seeds, and nuts prior to cooking or eating. Also consider a probiotic and/or fermented foods such as full-fat yogurt, kimchi, and fresh sauerkraut, which improve the beneficial gut flora for better digestion.

**Nourish yourself well.** Immunity is compromised when we are deficient in such nutrients as zinc, iron, folic acid,

selenium, and vitamins A, B6, C, and E. Consider a diet of mostly plants, eating colorful foods (for vitamins) and drinking daily herbal infusions (for minerals). Visit [herbalyogini.com/articles](http://herbalyogini.com/articles) for an instructional video on infusions and a recipe for elderberry syrup. You may also want to try a high-quality, food-based multivitamin and multi-mineral.

**Incorporate herbal tonics.** Some herbs address symptoms while others build baseline immunity. Three tonics used historically to bolster the immune ecosystem include astragalus root, homemade elderberry syrup, and



medicinal mushrooms such as reishi and turkey tail.

**Decrease Stress.** Stress disproportionately suppresses immune function. Practice systematic relaxation, deep breathing, meditation, or yoga to manage stress.

**Wash.** Not just your hands but also your sinuses. A daily Neti Pot is a powerful tool in keeping pathogens at bay.

**Eat raw garlic.** Not only does garlic ward off vampires, but it is also a natural antimicrobial. Finely cut up one to two cloves and expose to air for 15 minutes before swallowing.

When it comes to colds and flu, your best defense is a good offense. With these simple tools, may you stay healthy, wealthy, and wise the whole year through.

*This article contains general information about medical conditions and complementary treatment, and is not to be considered expert advice. Always consult your physician or other qualified healthcare provider before beginning any new treatment, diet, or fitness regimen. Jackie Dobrinska is a wellness coach and owner of Herbal Yogini ([herbalyogini.com](http://herbalyogini.com)). You can reach her at [jdobrinska@gmail.com](mailto:jdobrinska@gmail.com), or by phone at 828.337.2737.*