What to do about the Flu??

As soon as the leaves begin to fall, we as health care practitioners begin to receive calls about the flu. You may be wondering whether or not you should receive the vaccine, or what your other options are, but assuredly you are hoping not to have the flu!

Fortunately, for most people, the flu is not serious or fatal, but it certainly does present with 5-8 days of high fever, deep body aches, a head and often a chest cold, and generalized fatigue. Between 5-20% of the population in the U.S. contracts influenza each year. Many other people who think they have the flu actually have ILI (an influenza-like-illness), which presents similarly to the flu but with shorter duration and milder symptoms.

Healthcare guidelines on flu vaccination are made because the numbers of influenza cases in the U.S. are staggering. Each year, approximately 200,000 people are hospitalized in the U.S. with complications of influenza. Pneumonia is the greatest risk associated with the influenza virus, and can lead to serious complications and death in susceptible individuals (such as children under 5, the elderly >65, and the immunocompromised).

So what about the vaccine?

Influenza is a rapidly and constantly changing virus. Because it changes so quickly, the components of the vaccine are chosen based on speculation, making it very difficult to create a vaccine that is consistently highly effective at preventing the flu. However, this vaccine is highly effective against preventing the worst case scenarios such as ICU admission and death.

Most people who decline the flu vaccine do so due to concerns about variable effectiveness (generally about 55%), the need to “re-up” each year, and fear of the vaccines many preservatives and additives, particularly thimerosal.

Amongst the healthy U.S. population, the likelihood of an unvaccinated individual contracting the flu is approximately 16% in children and 11% in adults annually. Amongst healthy immunized individuals the likelihood is approximately 5% in children and 3% in adults who accepted the flu shot. Perhaps, the most important statistic to me as your child’s healthcare provider is that of the influenza related deaths that occur in the U.S. each year roughly 80-85% of the patients were unvaccinated.

If you have diabetes, asthma, heart disease, obesity, are a healthcare worker or school teacher, care for a child under 6 months of age, or are otherwise immunocompromised, the flu vaccine is particularly beneficial for you as you are at much greater risk of complications from influenza.

For the 2018-2019 season, I have stocked Fluzone’s quadrivalent preservative and thimerosal free single dose vaccine, and I am recommending it for all patients over 6 months of age.
Winter Wellness

Ways to Reduce Risks of Colds and Flu

1. Eat Whole Foods.

Food is the absolute best way to nourish your body. Be sure to give your body the nutrients it needs to ward off colds and flus. Focus on vitamin and mineral dense vibrantly colored vegetables and fruits: kale, chard, spinach, dandelion, squash, beets, carrots, sweet potatoes, broccoli, berries (if you don’t mind frozen!), tangerines, oranges, grapefruits, apples, and pears; small, cold-water fish; grass fed animal meats and eggs, rich in choline, cholesterol, and B vitamins; fermented foods such as yogurt, kefir, sauerkraut, and miso which are rich in probiotics (the good bacteria that protect your body against infection); and homemade soups and stews.

2. Wash Your Hands.

With all the germs we encounter in our workplaces, schools, and homes one of our best defenses against “catching what is going around” is to routinely wash our hands with soap and water. Be sure to wash your hands before preparing or eating food, after sneezing or coughing, after handling garbage, and after using the restroom.

3. Get To Bed Early.

In the winter months, most of us find ourselves desiring more sleep than usual. This is because sleep is the time when your body is able to rest and repair. Sleeping 8-10 hours per night in the winter gives your body ample time to repair its cells and restore its immune defenses.

4. Exercise.

Get moving. Exercise stimulates your immune system and enhances mood. In the winter this is a critical advantage to have. If gym motivation is difficult to muster, and it is tempting to curl up on your couch in the evening, make a pact with your spouse or a friend to go for a walk after dinner.

5. Vitamin D.

Vitamin D is necessary for proper immune function and specifically reduces the risk of respiratory infection.

It is estimated that 95% of the elderly and 85% of the general population in the U.S. is deficient in vitamin D in the wintertime.

Optimal blood levels of 25(OH) D are 50-65ng/ml. The average American has blood levels around 15-30ng/ml in the winter.

Supplementation of vitamin D3: infants 400iu, toddlers >22 lbs 1000iu, children >30lbs 2000IU, and adults 5000IU. (Higher doses are often used at the start of supplementation or based on an individual’s lab results.)
Zinc deficiency increases the likelihood of frequent colds and flus.
Zinc deficiency is estimated to be present in 40% of elderly and 12% of the general population. Symptoms of zinc deficiency include frequent colds and flus, lack of appetite, depression, impaired sense of taste and smell, and growth failure in children.
Foods containing zinc: liver, grass fed beef and lamb, crimini mushrooms, spinach, sea vegetables, pumpkin seeds, and green peas. Supplementation of Zinc Picolinate is recommended at 15mg/day.

7. Probiotics.
Probiotics are beneficial bacteria that help optimize immune function. They are found in cultured and fermented foods such as yogurt, kefir, miso, and sauerkraut. They can be supplemented in powder or capsule form. High quality and multiple strains are crucial to probiotic efficacy. Klaire therbiotic, Udo’s Super 8, Culturelle, Prescript-Assist, and HMF are my favorites.

8. Elderberry Syrup.
Elderberry is high in naturally occurring Vitamin C and has both antiviral and antibacterial properties. It can be taken as a preventative agent against the flu and as treatment for the flu. Interestingly, elderberry taken as a preventative agent has been shown to prevent the adherence to lung mucosa of influenza A & B, and 13 other microbial strains! What does that mean? Preventative dosing of elderberry has the potential to keep infections at the level of a head cold rather than a chest cold!
Supplementation of Elderberry:
Preventative: children 1 tsp/d, adults 1 Tbs/d.
Treating flu: children 1 tsp every 3-4 hours, adults 1 Tbs every 3-4 hours.

Wellness formula by Source Naturals is an herbal/vitamin/mineral compound that is phenomenal at helping mitigate symptoms and reduce the duration of respiratory illnesses. This is a combination formula that includes everything listed above except probiotics. Take at the first signs of illness.
Adults: 2 tablets 3x/day
Children: 1/4tsp 3x/day 12-30#, and 1/2tsp 3x/day if over 30#

May you be happy and well this winter!
Dr. Elizabeth Busetto