



IN THE ABSENCE OF THE INFLUENZA VACCINE

It's the flu season and odds are you already know someone who has tested positive for either Influenza A or B. Chances are you yourself have already contracted it. For most of us, it simply means some time off work or school to rest and recuperate, and then life goes back to normal. But, Influenza can be very serious and even deadly, especially if you have an underlying health condition such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease or kidney disease. It is a highly contagious illness that spreads mainly by droplets that are produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes or talks. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people standing nearby and possibly infect them. Symptoms of Influenza are similar to the common cold, only more severe. Symptoms include high fever, body aches and pains, a bad cough, runny nose and sore throat. Some may even experience vomiting or diarrhoea and extreme fatigue which may last for several weeks.



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The single most effective way to prevent influenza is to get vaccinated annually. However, in addition to vaccination, or should the influenza vaccine not be accessible to you, what are the other things you can do to protect yourself?

Avoid The Germs: It's not hard to catch the flu. A sick person just has to sneeze or cough within two meters away from you and you are likely to catch it. You can also get the flu germs from touching contaminated surfaces, e.g when you touch a table in a restaurant that a person infected with Influenza was dining at before you. The flu germs can also be found on surfaces such as dining tables, cashier counters, doorknobs and even the handrail belt of an escalator. Germs can linger on these surfaces for up to eight hours. When you touch one of these surfaces and then touch your face, nose or mouth, you are transferring the virus into your body. So, practising good hygiene habits is a step towards building a barrier between you and the flu germs.

Avoid Crowded Areas:

When the flu season comes around, it's best to refrain from going to public areas that are very crowded. This includes shopping malls, cinemas and indoor playgrounds. However, if you have to be in a crowd, do wear a mask to protect yourself, such as when you are on a bus or on a train commuter to and from work.

Avoid Sharing:

Although sharing is caring and a great way to bond with family and friends, it's also the fastest way to spread germs through saliva. If you are sharing a main dish, use a serving spoon. Don't share your utensils, plates and glasses with others, and ensure all used dishes and utensils are washed with hot water and soap.

Maintain Your Immune System:

When your immune system is strong, you are less susceptible to infections. So, to boost your immune system, eat a well-balanced diet rich in vitamin C and

Zinc. Maintain an active lifestyle with a regular exercise routine and get enough sleep.

If you've been unfortunate to catch the flu bug, a combination of natural remedies and medication may be helpful to manage your symptoms at home. Over-the-counter medication such as anti-histamines, lozenges and cough syrup can help relieve your symptoms. Pain relief medication can help manage headaches and body pain. Certain natural remedies, although may not cure you, will help to soothe your symptoms.



Certain Steps Include:-

- Washing your hands regularly with warm water and soap, especially after shaking hands or touching a seemingly germ-covered surface
- Alternatively, it's strongly recommended to keep a hand sanitizer with you when you are going out in public places where you may not have access to a sink to wash your hands.
- Additionally, carry disinfectant wipes with you to clean surfaces such as your table at a restaurant before you touch it
- Resist the urge to touch your face, mouth and nose before washing your hands



Stay Hydrated:

It's always important to drink plenty of water on a daily basis. It is even more important to stay hydrated when you are ill with the flu. Water helps to keep the mucous membranes in our nose, mouth and throat moist and this helps the body to get rid of any built up mucous or phlegm. Additionally, when you are experiencing a high fever, such as when you are ill with Influenza, you are losing water from the surface of your skin. If you are experiencing diarrhoea, that is further fluid loss. A poor appetite also means that you are not eating or drinking enough but it's important to stay hydrated during an illness. Examples of fluids you can

consume to stay hydrated are:

- Plain water
- Coconut water
- Sports drinks
- Fresh juices
- Broth
- Soups
- Water-rich fruits such as watermelon, oranges, cantaloupe, strawberries, grapes

To ensure you are drinking enough fluids, it's important to keep an eye on your urine output. You will know if you are well-hydrated if you have to pass urine regularly and the colour of your urine is clear to a pale yellow.



Drink Warm Chicken

Broth: The classic old wives' cure for the common cold is chicken broth. Its beneficial effects are numerous. Firstly, it aids in hydration, which is a key factor to recovery, and secondly, the steam from the hot broth helps to loosen and relieve nasal and throat congestion. Thirdly, chicken broth, rich in protein and nutrients, also helps to boost the immune system.

Other Natural Remedies:

A warm water and salt gargle can help soothe the throat and clear excessive secretions. Breathing in steam from a pot of hot water can relieve congestion in the nose, throat and sinuses. As the flu virus survives longer in dry air, using a humidifier to add humidity in your home may help reduce the flu virus circulating in the air. It is a known fact that certain spices have anti-oxidant and bactericidal effect, such as turmeric, garlic, and cloves. Star anise which is the star-shaped spice, is one of the principal active ingredients in Oseltamivir, the anti-viral drug used to treat Influenza. Therefore, a herbal/spiced drink may help you fight off the flu virus, such as a green tea infused with star anise. Pure honey can be added to soothe the throat.

Foods To Consume: Both Zinc and Vitamin C help to shorten the length of illness and relieve symptoms by boosting the immune system. Therefore, consuming foods rich in vitamin C and Zinc is helpful. Foods

that are high in Zinc include red meat, lentils, chickpeas, beans, nuts, dairy and eggs. Examples of Vitamin C rich food include citrus fruits, avocados, papaya, cantaloupe, broccoli, cauliflower and capsicum. Garlic also has anti-viral properties, so eating a meal rich in garlic can help support the immune system and combat infection. Ginger may help nausea that accompanies the flu and reduce the frequency of vomiting. It can either be added to a soup or a herbal drink. Oatmeal is another good option when ill with the flu. It is a great source of fiber, which keeps the stomach full and also has pre-biotic fiber which promotes a healthy gut.

Foods To Avoid

Certain foods can slow down the recovery from the flu. Avoid alcohol as it dehydrates the body and weakens the immune system. Processed food can be high in salt, which can dehydrate the body and greasy food can slow down digestion. Dairy products can be hard to digest when you are ill with the flu and should be avoided until flu symptoms resolve. Also avoid food with rough edges such as crackers and crisps as they can scratch the throat and worsen soreness that you may experience.



Most people who have Influenza have a mild illness and may not need to see a doctor. However, a visit to the doctor is needed for the following :

- Those who are over 65 years old and younger than 12 years old.



- Pregnant women or those who recently delivered a baby in the last 2 weeks.
- Individuals who have an underlying chronic medical condition such as Diabetes, Kidney, Lung or Liver Disease.



- Those with a high Body Mass Index (BMI) of more than 40.
- Those who are not able to eat or drink anything.
- Those who are having difficulty breathing.