

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Katie Gravesen, DC

Eight Ways to Boost Your Immune System

How strong is your immune system? Do you know? Do you even think about your immune system when you're not sick? If not, you should. You have the power to make your immune system stronger and decrease your chances of getting sick. Get your immune system in top form now. Read on to find out how.



Stress, poor dietary habits, sleep deprivation and spinal misalignment can take a toll on your body's immune system: leaving it vulnerable to disease. Fortunately, Dr. Gravesen shows patients how to do something about it!

Dr. Gravesen is committed to helping patients adopt the **chiropractic lifestyle**, a way of life that promotes wellness by maintaining spinal integrity and spotlighting prevention.

The chiropractic lifestyle centers on the correction of dysfunctional areas in the spine called **vertebral subluxations**. This common condition — linked to carpal tunnel syndrome, backaches, headaches, infantile colic, ear infections and a host of other maladies — occurs when spinal movement is restricted or spinal bones (vertebrae) become misaligned. Scientific evidence reveals that vertebral subluxations may also weaken the body's immune system, reducing its ability to fend off disease.

Dr. Gravesen corrects vertebral subluxations with safe and gentle maneuvers called **chiropractic adjustments**.

How Does the Immune System Work?

How does the immune system ward off illness? By keeping the body in balance and functioning at optimal wellness. Imagine your immune system as a giant force field surrounding every cell, organ and tissue in your body. When the force field is activated, you could be trapped in an elevator packed with sneezing people — and still be protected.

Through a complex system of chemical messengers known as cytokines, the immune system also controls cell growth, inflammation, cell death and energy production.

A powerful immune system is a key component of chiropractic's all-natural preventative strategy against disease. Instead of relying on potentially dangerous household cleaners, drugs and other forms of "protection" from the invisible world of bacteria and viruses, Dr. Gravesen encourages patients to concentrate on building stalwart immune systems. Following are eight ways to do just that.

1. Calendar in Chiropractic Visits

Research shows that chiropractic care may improve immune response. When vertebrae (spinal bones) are out of alignment, they can exert pressure on adjacent nerves. Since the nervous system controls all functions of the body, including the immune system, it

stands to reason that chiropractic care may have a beneficial effect on immune function, in turn keeping disease at bay.

One study looked at the effect of chiropractic adjustments on two specific white-blood cells associated with immune function. Levels of polymorphonuclear neutrophils and monocytes — both of which destroy unhealthy cells — were "significantly higher" following chiropractic adjustments than before (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 1991;14:399-408).

Another analysis included 327 boys and 323 girls, ranging in age from 2 to 18. Ninety-three percent of the youngsters suffered from misalignments of the hips. After reviewing these children's cases, researchers discovered a direct link between misalignments of the spine and weakened immune systems (*JVSR* 2004:1-23).

Investigators in Australia also note that chiropractic adjustments may influence key cellular, antibody and endorphin (the "happiness hormone") levels: all of which boost immunity (*Chiropractic J Aust* 1993;23:132-5).



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2. Stop Stress

Stress raises body levels of cortisol: commonly known as the “fight or flight” hormone. Excessive levels of cortisol are linked to a wide variety of diseases, including type 2 diabetes, some cancers and a plethora of psychological disorders like anxiety and post-traumatic stress syndrome. The chiropractic lifestyle, however, promotes stress reduction — helping patients keep cortisol levels from spiking into the danger zone.

Fortunately, patients report that regular chiropractic adjustments and wellness education alleviate stress.

3. Embrace Exercise

Research shows that regular exercise is even more effective than medication for depression and anxiety: without the hazardous side effects.

But that’s not all. When 25 postmenopausal survivors of breast cancer trained on cycle ergometers three times per week for 15 weeks, scientists made an amazing discovery. After comparing the women to 28 postmenopausal women who did not exercise, they found that exercise training increased production of the “natural killer cell cytotoxin.” (*J Appl Physiol* 2005;98:1534-40.)

A potent immune booster, these “natural killer” cells have the power to destroy cancer cells upon contact (*Immunol Lett* 2004;93:205-10).

4. Savor Your Sleep

Skipping out on beauty rest won’t only affect your looks. Missed sleep also triggers “deep changes on the immune function,” according to researchers in Spain (*Rev Neurol* 2005;40:548-56).

“In modern society, which is characterized by a rapid pace of life, high demands, efficiency and competitiveness in a global economy, it is likely that lack of rest, recovery and restitution is a greater health problem than the absolute level of stress,” say researchers in Sweden (*Psychoneuroendo* 2005;30:1017-21).

5. Amplify Antioxidant Intake

Fresh fruits and vegetables are loaded with antioxidants that zap disease-causing free radical chemicals. Unchecked, free radicals can wreak havoc on cellular development, sparking disease and weakening the immune system.

For instance, scientific studies show that high consumption of antioxidant-rich vegetables and fruits has a protective effect against cancer (*Urol Clin North Am* 2002;29:157-68).



6. Dissect Your Diet

In addition to adding plenty of antioxidant-rich foods to your diet, select whole-grain foods whenever possible. And don’t forget to monitor your fat and salt intake, along with choosing lean sources of protein.

Whenever possible, it’s also best to shop for organic produce and meat that is free from hormones and antibiotics. That goes for dairy products as well. And, avoid fast food as much as possible.

7. Stay Social

Social butterflies have stronger immune systems than people who keep to themselves, say scientists.

Social networks that are larger or “provide greater instrumental and emotional support contribute to improved health and, perhaps, greater longevity.” (*J Gerontol B Psychol Sci Soc Sci* 2005;60:143-52.)

One theory is that social interaction boosts immune function through the release of those “feel good” endorphins we mentioned earlier. But here’s

an interesting note: The social interaction doesn’t have to be just with humans!

In one experiment, researchers assigned 55 college students to one of three groups: those who pet a live dog, those who pet a stuffed dog and those who merely sat comfortably on a couch. The duration of each activity was 18 minutes. Using pre- and post-saliva tests, results showed a “significant increase” of the immune-boosting chemical immunoglobulin in the group who pet the live dogs, but not the other groups (*Psychol Rep* 2004;95:1087-91).

8. Ponder Positively

A wealth of research proves that *how* we think has a dramatic effect on our health. But perhaps one of the most intriguing studies is based on the autobiographies written more than 60 years ago by a group of 180 young nuns.

The nuns who chronicled positive emotions in their 20s lived markedly longer than those who recounted emotionally neutral personal histories. “This result, which derives from a study group with unprecedented similarity in lifestyle and social status, supports earlier evidence that expressing happiness, interest, love, and other positive feelings enhances physical health,” says psychologist Deborah D. Danner and her colleagues at the University of Kentucky in Lexington (*Sci News* 2001;159:324).

It’s interesting to note that the nuns — by virtue of their vocation — also gave freely to others: another personality trait with potential links to a strong immune system and longevity.

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