



Linda's T'ai Chi Weekly Handout September 27, 2020

Our Immune System: A Life-Style Approach to Boosting your Immune System

Perhaps it is just me, but I find myself watching more TV. I usually mute during the advertising but I have been noticing the increased ads for all-things-COVID 19. In particular the number of products that are "clinically proven" to boost your immune system. Let's first start with the words, "clinically proven." Clinically proven has no meaning in the world of science, testing, oversight, blind studies, control groups etc.; all of the science-based protocols that inform us that a product is safe and effective.

"Clinically proven" sound like the product has gone through strict clinical trials with a large sample of human volunteers with data to support findings. But what it really means is that somewhere, out in the world somewhere, one person or a million people tried a product in an experimental setting and said it was "Okay" Bingo- clinically proven.

Are there drugs or supplements that boost the immune system?

"Unfortunately, the reality is that those kinds of products aren't really offering you any benefit," says Michael Starnbach, a professor of microbiology at Harvard Medical School. "There's no evidence that they help in fighting disease." Here is the caveat: I am not referring to drugs called Immunomodulators that are used to boost specific parts of the immune system to fight a particular disease. I am referring to the over-the-counter "clinically proven" supplements that are sold to boost the immune system in otherwise healthy people. Here is my second caveat: some of you may take a supplement to boost your immune system and feel they are helping you. Please do what is right for you and please, I mean no offense to those of you who feel that a supplement you are taking is working. My intent is to set forth a premise based on research and to share life-style strategies that can strengthen your immune system to maintain your overall health and wellbeing.

What is the immune system?

The immune system is just that- a system. It is a network of cells, organs, and proteins that defend the body against invaders. Like the Army, the immune system is an intricate network of units that act together to combat invaders, in this case bacteria, viruses and other "enemies."

Since it is a system of many parts, not a single unit, it cannot technically be boosted. However, it can be strengthened to run efficiently in order to fight off diseases. The moral of the story- keep your body's soldiers fit and ready by living a healthy lifestyle.

The main parts of the immune system include white blood cells, antibodies, complement system, spleen, bone marrow, thymus, lymphatic system and the skin. Each of these work together to identify, remember, ward- off and/or attack invading bacteria, viruses and rogue cells. Our body also has other defenders to ward-off microbes - the skin, lungs, digestive tract, and our bodily fluids (skin oil, tears) as well as our urinary and GI tract.

There are immune system boosting strategies that are science based that we can employ to maintain and sustain our overall health and wellbeing. The goal is to optimize the functioning of this amazing system called the immune system.

- Exercise regularly – take a walk every day, do T'ai Chi, move naturally
- Eat a healthy, balanced diet
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Get a reasonable amount of sleep
- Reduce stress and develop good coping mechanisms
- Quit smoking
- Drink alcohol only in moderation, if at all
- Take steps to prevent infection
- Participate in mindful meditation- like T'ai Chi-meditation in motion.

There is evidence that vitamins can be helpful in maintaining a healthy immune system like Vitamin D and C. These and other vitamins help the cells to function more optimally. According to Dr. Chris D'Adamo an epidemiologist with expertise in the synergistic effects of healthy lifestyle practices on human health and wellness and Director for Integrative Medicine at the University of Maryland School of Medicine, says that further research needs to be completed on foods like raw honey, mushrooms and elderberry.

No one has all of the answers on how our bodies work and how our various systems function. There are still many mysteries about how and why we get sick, and how and why we recover. Case in point-COVID 19. We each make our own decision on what works based on how we feel and what we believe. This is important as I am a firm believer that we know our bodies best. My purpose in writing about the immune system is to focus on the life style strategies we can employ to improve our overall health and wellbeing.

Keep doing what is best for you.
Stay safe and be well.

Peace,
Linda