

HEALTHY HELP

Staying Healthy with Dr. Aieta, N.D.



Dr. Aieta,
I've gotten at least half a dozen colds, the flu once or twice and bronchitis at least once a year for the better part of a decade. I've had to rely on antibiotics to get over most of these illnesses. In between infections I feel pretty good, no other health complaints. My primary doctor referred me to an infectious disease specialist and he couldn't find anything wrong with my immune system. What could be causing me to acquire so many infections, and is there anything I can do naturally to prevent them?

Jill M.

This is a common problem. What I find in virtually all patients com-

plaining of chronic infections is that they are consuming quite a bit of refined sugar and carbs. Eating these has been shown to have an adverse effect on the immune system. In one study, healthy young adults drank 24 ounces of a cola beverage containing about 66 grams of sugar. Within 45 minutes, the ability of their white blood cells to kill bacteria dropped by about 50 percent.

Similar effects were produced by ingesting 100 grams of glucose, fructose, honey or even orange juice. This decline in immune function persisted for up to five hours.

Understandably, I advise patients with recurrent infections to discontinue all refined sugar, including fruit juices, which most people guzzle when they are sick thinking the vitamin C will help them get over their illness.

In addition, I have all my patients, regardless of immune function, take a high-potency multi-vitamin that is high in immune-boosting nutrients like vitamins A,

C and D, zinc and selenium. I have found vitamin D to have the most profound effects on the immune system. Typically if my patients take high doses of vitamin D3 at the first sign of a cold or flu, then for most of them the illness is short-lived. Since vitamin D is fat soluble, high doses should only be used under the close supervision of a physician.

In any patient suffering from chronic infections, I always assess thyroid gland function through blood testing. The thyroid gland plays an important role in immune function. White blood cells from a patient with low thyroid function have an impaired ability to kill bacteria and viruses. Typically, this defect can be corrected by treatment with natural thyroid hormone.

In my opinion, some patients with recurrent infections have subtle thyroid conditions that are commonly overlooked by conventional doctors. I will typically base my treatment on the patient's other clinical symptoms and much more in-depth lab testing. There are also many different

herbs that work to reduce the occurrences of chronic infection.

My favorites are garlic and goldenseal. In my practice, I use a potent standardized form of the active ingredient in garlic called allicin, which has been shown in clinical studies to dramatically reduce the number of colds and flu when taken daily in a low dose.

So, if you suffer from one cold or flu after another, seek the help of a naturopathic physician to get you on the right diet, supplements and herbs, in addition to having your thyroid properly evaluated.

Dr. Frank Aieta is a board-certified and licensed Naturopathic Physician with a private practice in West Hartford, Conn. He specializes in the treatment of disease, using natural therapies such as acupuncture, homeopathy, spinal manipulation, clinical nutrition, and herbal medicine. If there is a specific topic you would like to see addressed in an upcoming column, you can e-mail him at DrAieta@aol.com, or visit www.DrAieta.com for additional information.

THE LEAN LOOK

Women's Fitness with Lisa Thomas

I can tell you from experience that most women who come into the gym want to look and feel leaner. Some even say that they want a dancer's body: lean, toned and with nice definition. This is the reason that so many women are flocking to yoga and pilates. There are three key factors that a woman can incorporate into her fitness program to create a long streamlined look without creating bulk.

In addition to your core classes, remember that it is just as important to incorporate 30-40 minutes of cardio, three to five times a week into your routine. I know it sounds like a lot, but the feeling that you look your best is priceless.

Consider these three tips:

1. Work the muscle in an eccentric contraction. The eccentric contraction is the lengthening part of the muscle. Most strength and conditioning moves are based on the concentric contraction or shortening of the muscle. The result is a short, tight, bulky muscle. For example, consider the difference between a squat and a plie (pronounced "plee-ay" – you know, like the ballerina move). The squat focuses more on the shortening of the muscle and the plie focuses on the eccentric contraction of the muscle.

Combine traditional weight training with some longer weight training movements. Your trainer can help you find some creative, safe moves.

2. Work your supporting muscles. We have many small muscle groups in the lower body that can be worked without weights to improve the shape of our butts or inner and outer thighs. A combination of yoga poses or basic stretches held for at least 30-60 seconds after the deep muscle conditioning has been performed are ideal. It takes the mind at least 30-60 seconds for the muscle to release.

The important factor in stretching is that if you take a muscle to the point of fatigue and then you specifically open it up and stretch it, this creates a longer leaner muscle. It also allows other muscles not to compensate. For example, when your

hip flexors are tight, the quadriceps take too much stress and therefore can become overworked and bulky.

3. Saving the best for last – Love that cardio. We have to remember to balance our cardio; too much can have the reverse effect, like lost muscle and storage of fat. A well-balanced cardio program is the use of several machines a week, each with sessions lasting 30 to 45 minutes at a time. I suggest three to five days a week.

One big suggestion I have is to change it up. Add some variety, whether it is in workout cycles that last for a few weeks, or even in one day. You could walk for a while, then jog, then work on a training machine. Mix and match, but keep moving.

Just be sure to be careful; hours of weekly endurance work will trigger the metabolic adaptations that tend to deflate and weaken those strength-and-power fast-twitch muscle fibers, making it harder to lift weights and achieve the overall goal. Your smaller slow-twitch fibers will take



on a more dominant role.

This can sabotage the pursuit of the overall dancer's body. And we're not in the business of sabotage; we're in the business of success.

Lisa Thomas is a personal trainer/fitness coach in the Greater Springfield area, as well as owner of Thomas Fitness Center and Fit Kidz of Massachusetts. Contact her at (413) 426-5543 or t.fitness@hotmail.com, or visit www.thomasfitnesscenter.com.