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Dear Friends,

When I was in my late teens and twenties, I read beautiful, enlightening, and personally liberating novels, literature, and philosophy. Oscar Wilde, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Balzac, Steinbeck, Rilke, Shelley, Aldous Huxley, and others influenced my life and thought, and in some ways liberated my mind.

I was frequently told by more “experienced” elders that while these might be enjoyable, they are not “real” life, but I think that the situations, characters, thoughts, and experiences that these artists created were as real in their painting of life as any actual everyday experience, and far more educational. In short, I found them spiritually uplifting, and philosophically enlightening, and I can still feel the deep influence they had on my life and thought.

Now, whenever I sit down to write, I find the latest news and begin reporting the latest from the USDA, the AMA, FDA, NCI, AHA, and other acronyms that make me feel far removed from any spiritual and personal growth. But personal growth and development are as essential to long term health and fulfillment as any specific physical health practices.

Maintaining aesthetic and cultural activities, and adding new interests and challenges to the mind and spirit are valuable ways to ensure not simply longer life, but later years that are richly

rewarding and filled with new learning. Some animal evidence suggests that exercise enhances brain circulation, but learning enhances neuronal health. Other studies show that participation in cultural events (art exhibits, museums, concerts, theater, and reading), may enhance longevity, but more importantly, they have a positive influence on a person’s perception of their health.

However, I don’t need scientific studies to confirm this for me, as I see it all the time: those who participate actively in cultural development are never bored, they have a vibrant sense of enjoyment and vitality, and they are wonderful friends with interesting stories and delightful senses of humor. While passive participation is valuable, it is more important to learn new skills and crafts. My own interests are in playing early music (recorder for 30 years, and recently violin), doing pottery and photography, writing, and graphic design (with others waiting in the wings).

Varied interests, arts and crafts lead to personal and spiritual growth, and help you to maintain friendships. A supportive circle of friends is a wonderful asset in later years. Both the interests and the friends help you maintain your senses of beauty, humor, wonder, joy, and adventure that I wrote about last January. While it is important to take care of yourself with physical and health practices, such as diet, exercise, relaxation, and dietary supplements, it is at least as valuable, and makes life all the more rewarding if you fulfill your potential by taking care of your personal growth needs.

Managing Colds and Flu

As a result of varied and cold weather, closed rooms, poor ventilation, dry heat, and increasing exposure to many people with viruses in the winter, it is almost certain that you will be at risk for colds or flu. Colds cause significant discomfort and loss of productivity. However, it is not inevitable that you will become ill, and if you do, many natural treatments can relieve your symptoms and shorten the duration of your infection.

Rhinoviruses are the most common pathogens that cause colds. These viruses are often transmitted by hand contact with others, and they are then introduced into the body through the eyes or nose. One of the most effective ways to prevent colds is frequent hand washing, and using one of the new alcohol-based hand cleansers that contain some skin softeners. (Flu viruses are mainly transmitted by airborne droplets from coughing and sneezing.)

Because viruses are also transferred by contact with contaminated surfaces, such as doorknobs, light switches, toilet handles, faucets, or phones, it is important to clean these surfaces, and to clean your hands after touching them. Cold viruses in the throat attach to cells and replicate, leading to symptoms within 10 to 16 hours.

Keep your home humidified to prevent drying of the membranes lining the nose, sinuses, and throat. One way to do this is by keeping a large pot of water warming on the stove. Don't turn it up so high that the walls become wet, as increased mold growth can increase colds, and don't let it run dry and become a fire hazard. You do not need to keep it on while you are out, as it works fairly quickly to humidify the house (assuming you have enough circulation of air to move it through all the rooms).

Regular aerobic exercise enhances immune function and helps to prevent infectious illnesses. If you get a cold or flu, don't overdo the physical activity, as you need extra rest to recover. Stress reduction and adequate rest are also essential for a strong immune system.

Diet and Supplements Can Help

You can enhance your immune function by choosing healthy foods. Refined sugar is one of the most likely foods to inhibit immunity. Eating as little as five teaspoons, the amount in a candy

bar, can reduce white blood cell function by 25 percent, and higher amounts are worse. Margarine and other hydrogenated oils inhibit normal regulatory substances called prostaglandins, and alter normal immune function.

A whole foods diet with lots of fruits and vegetables will provide vitamin C, flavonoids, and other nutrients, but it is still a good idea to take supplements that help prevent colds and to reduce the symptoms and the duration of colds if you do become ill. The medical cliché is that an untreated cold will last for a week, but with proper treatment it will be gone in seven days, but this ignores all the research on dietary supplements that can help you feel better faster.

Thirty years ago, Linus Pauling wrote *Vitamin C, The Common Cold, and The Flu*, reviewing the research showing that high doses of vitamin C could both prevent and treat colds. It is still true that vitamin C can help immune function and reduce the frequency of colds, and it also lessens the intensity and duration of the illness, but it is not a miracle that eliminates symptoms in a day.

I often recommend up to 8 to 10 gms a day for colds. Some research shows that during a viral infection, white blood cell vitamin C levels plummet, and supplements of 200 mg of vitamin C have little effect on this. However, doses of 6000 mg can maintain high levels of vitamin C in the white blood cells, helping them fight the virus.

Herbs That Fight Colds

The herb echinacea is effective to reduce the duration and severity of colds. In a recent German study of standardized extract, those subjects in the placebo group had symptoms 50 percent longer than those with echinacea treatment.

In a study of garlic extract, in 146 subjects over a 12 week period, the treatment group had only 24 colds compared to 65 colds in the placebo group. Also, those who did get colds had an average of two days of symptoms rather than five. I recommend 500 to 1000 mg of deodorized extract daily.

In a review of 496 records of school-aged children, zinc lozenges reduced the duration and severity of colds, as well as complications requiring antibiotic use. When taken daily for prevention, they decreased the frequency of colds. The typical dose of zinc lozenges is 15 mg several times a day.

Elderberry extract inhibits the replication of viruses, particularly the flu virus, reducing the duration of this more serious viral infection. It enhances immune function, increasing production of cytokines—messenger molecules that trigger the response to infection. The typical daily dose is 1000 to 2000 mg of standardized extract.

A number of other supplements enhance immunity, and may help support host resistance to viruses. Vitamin E reduces infections, especially in the elderly. Beta 1,3 glucan is one of many mushroom extracts that maintain white blood cell function. A study showed that in trauma patients, pneumonia was reduced from 55 percent to 10 percent with B1,3 glucan supplements. The usual dose is 100 to 200 mg daily.

Others beneficial supplements include carotenoids, astragalus, maitake mushroom, L-arginine, and L-glutamine. You can combine any of these with your supplement routine and other health practices to reduce risks of colds and flu, or their duration and severity if you do become ill.

Ask Dr. J

Q. I am 53 years old and experiencing gout in my ankles, and knees. Is there a supplement I can take to mitigate this problem?

CN, Cummaquid, MA, via Email.

A. Gout is an arthritic disease that results from deposits of uric acid crystals in joints. Uric acid can also deposit in the kidneys, and other tissues. It can cause severe pain, most commonly in the big toe, but also in other joints, and it can lead to uric acid kidney stones.

Uric acid is the byproduct of purine metabolism (part of the nucleic acids in DNA), and purine is high in a number of foods, including small fish such as anchovies, meat, especially organ meats, shellfish, yeast extracts, and some beans. It helps to reduce consumption of these foods, as well as caffeine, alcohol, and sugar. Alcohol can reduce uric acid excretion and sugar raises blood levels.

Eat foods low in purines: vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and nuts, and drink plenty of water to flush uric acid from the body. Some research and clinical experience suggests that eating a half pound of cherries or drinking the juice can relieve gout (they are also a tasty treat).

Xanthine oxidase is the enzyme that makes uric acid from purines. Supplements can reduce enzyme activity, reduce uric acid production, and help relieve the symptoms and prevent recurrences of gout. Other supplements are anti-inflammatory.

Vitamin C in high doses (4 to 8 gms per day) can increase uric acid excretion, but it is very important to drink adequate water to prevent the urinary uric acid from crystallizing. Quercetin, a bioflavonoid, inhibits xanthine oxidase in lab tests. The typical daily dose is 800 to 1200 mg.

Folic acid, in some studies but not all, inhibits xanthine oxidase if taken in very high doses, ranging from 20 to 80 mg. No side effects have been reported with these doses, but it is important to have adequate B 12 at the same time.

Curcumin (600 to 900 mg), omega-3 oil (fish oil—3000 to 6000 mg, or flaxseed oil—1 to 3 Tbsp) are anti-inflammatory, as is gamma-linolenic acid (GLA, 240 mg) from evening primrose or borage oils, and they can reduce symptoms of gout.

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Gout

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In the Health News

- St. John's wort was shown clearly to help depression in a review published in July (Schulz V, Clinical trials with hypericum extracts in patients with depression... *Phytomedicine* 2002 Jul;9(5):468-74). The report showed that in 34 controlled, double-blind studies on over 3000 subjects, with mild to moderate depression, St. John's wort was as good as or even better than drugs. A new study confirms that it helps anxiety and depression (Volz HP, et al., St John's wort extract ... *Psychopharmacology* (Berl) 2002 Nov;164(3):294-300). Patients had fewer anxiety-induced physical complaints, and both mild and severe depression improved. Typical doses are 600 to 900 mg of standardized extract.
- Neurotoxic pesticide levels were extremely low in children fed organic foods, compared with dangerous levels (6 to 9 times higher) in children on conventional foods, (Curl CL, et al., *ehpnet1.niehs.nih.gov/docs/2003/5754/abstract.pdf*). Somehow, the USDA insists that organic foods are no safer than conventional foods, but research disagrees.

Diet and Disease

- A population study shows that diet does affect acne (Cordain L, et al., Acne vulgaris: a disease of Western civilization. *Arch Dermatol* 2002 Dec;138(12):1584-90). These researchers studied hunter-gatherers and concluded that the refined carbohydrates in the industrialized diet might cause acne. In the two groups they studied—in New Guinea and Paraguay, diets consisted of primarily of fruit, fish, tubers, and coconut, or sweet manioc (a root vegetable), peanuts, corn, and rice, with occasional wild game, respectively. These diets mimic the high-fiber, plant-based diets that I recommend. They found virtually no acne in these groups, compared to their genetic relatives in other Pacific islanders and South American Indians with more processed foods in their diets.

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Mushroom Barley Soup

Mushrooms help immunity, and putting them in soups is one delicious way to enjoy them. I use fresh crimini mushrooms and fresh or dried shitake (and other varieties; the dried are less expensive). Heat water or vegetable stock (I buy organic vegetable stock and dilute it with an equal amount of water) in a large stock pot with the dried mushrooms to soak. Sauté onions, garlic, and celery, add them to the stock with chopped parsley, fresh dill, thyme, and marjoram (plus cayenne pepper, sea salt, or soy sauce to taste). Add organic barley, diced potatoes and carrots, and the fresh mushrooms, Barley absorbs a lot of water, so if you don't add enough it will become a stew instead of a soup. Lastly, add lots of chopped spinach or Swiss chard. Serve with a fresh salad for a delicious meal.

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