

The flu is coming, the flu is coming!

Influenza, or the "flu," is a respiratory infection caused by a variety of flu viruses. Most people are aware of the way it "knocks you off your feet" as it sweeps through entire communities. The flu differs from the common cold in several ways, even though the common cold is also a respiratory infection caused by a virus. For example, people with colds rarely get fevers, headaches, or suffer from the extreme exhaustion that flu viruses can cause.

The US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that 10 to 20 percent of Americans come down with the flu each flu season, which typically lasts from November to March. Children are two to three times more likely to get sick with the flu, and children frequently spread the virus to others. Although most

DR. PROODIAN'S HEALTH CORNER

By: Dr. James Proodian



people recover from the flu, the CDC estimates that in the US more than 100,000 people are hospitalized and about 36,000 people die from the flu and its complications every year. The illness is life threatening primarily to elderly people, newborn babies, and people with certain chronic illnesses.

You can get the flu if someone around you who has the flu coughs or sneezes. People can also get it by simply by touching a surface like a telephone or doorknob that has been contaminated. You are at the greatest risk

of getting infected in highly populated areas, such as crowded living quarters, work environments with many employees and limited space, and schools.

If the flu virus infects you, you will usually feel symptoms from one to four days later. You can spread the flu to others before your symptoms start and for another three to four days after your symptoms appear. The symptoms typically include headaches, chills, dry cough, body aches, fever, stuffy nose, and sore throat.

Scientists make a new flu vaccine every year because the strains of flu viruses change from year to year. The vaccine preparation is based on the strains of flu viruses that are in circulation at the time. Sometimes an unpredicted new strain may appear after the vaccine has been made and distributed to health care providers and clinics. Because of this, even if you do get the flu vaccine, you may still get infected. Viruses for producing the vaccine are grown in chicken eggs. The flu vaccine may contain some egg protein, which can cause an allergic reaction. If you are allergic to eggs or have ever had a serious allergic reaction to the flu vaccine, the CDC recommends that you consult with your health care provider before getting vaccinated.

Many people treat their flu infections simply by resting in bed, drinking plenty of fluids, and taking over the counter medicine such as aspirin or Tylenol.

But do not give aspirin to children or adolescents who may have the flu, and do not take antibiotics to treat the flu, because antibiotics do not work on viruses.

Patients often inquire about "natural" ways to prevent and treat the flu. Other than the obvious ones which include washing your hands, avoiding large crowds of people, getting plenty of rest and fluids, and making sure you are circulating the air at home and at work by opening windows, there are some less obvious ones as well. Do you know that sugar causes a suppression of your immune system and lowers your resistance? Sugar, which is the leading cause of obesity as well as other health issues, actually reduces your ability to fight off flu infections. By the way ... we consume on average 150 pounds of sugar per person, per year in the US — far too much!

The supplements recommended for increasing immune function and fighting off the flu virus are Vitamin C (the amount needed varies), Vitamin A plus Beta Carotene (15,000 IU daily), Zinc Gluconate lozenges (dissolve one lozenge under the tongue every two hours), Garlic capsules (two capsules three times daily), Vitamin B complex (100 mg daily) in a multivitamin complex, and protein in the form of free form amino acids (as directed on the label). I always advise seeking the help of a health care professional who is trained in nutri-

tion for guidance. Also, be careful when buying supplements - make sure that they are of high quality. Typically, capsules are better than solids.

I hope we can all avoid the flu virus this season. As always, I recommend building a strong internal defense to fight viruses and bacteria before they become a problem. Plenty of sleep, proper nutrition, reducing stress, moderate exercise, daily hygiene, and keeping a positive mental attitude all contribute to our overall well-being.

One final note. There are hundreds of strains of flu virus, with the vaccine only being effective against one — the one the scientists feel is the most prominent. Just because you get vaccinated does not mean that you will not get the flu. In other words, the flu vaccine can create a false sense of security. Our daily activities and nutritional habits play a much greater role in our immune system defenses and overall health.

Once again, if there is anything I can do to help, just ask.

■
Dr. James Proodian is a Certified Chiropractic Sports Physician and Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist with degrees in Public Health and Nutrition. He can be reached at Natural Healthcare Center of West End, (732) 222-2219. Dr. Proodian's Health Corner appears every other week.