



Asthma and Allergy
Foundation of America®

TEXAS CHAPTER

BUILD A STRONG IMMUNE SYSTEM TO HELP FIGHT ALLERGIES

Most know that allergies are inter-related with our immune systems: but what is the immune system? Our **immune system** is a network of organs and cells working together to **defend us against disease**. This system blocks “foreign” proteins, substances not meant to be in our bodies, from entering our body. When harmful proteins are detected, the immune system sends out soldiers or “**antibodies**” on “search and destroy” missions. These antibodies can identify what is a normal cell versus a substance that doesn’t belong, an invader. Antibodies **destroy** those **foreign invaders, keeping us from getting sick**. Antibodies destroy bacteria or viruses in simple illness like colds, flu or a stomach virus as well as big invaders like cancer or heart disease. Antibodies are such powerful and intelligent “soldiers” that people who undergo organ transplants must take medications to weaken their immune systems so the antibodies don’t destroy the transplanted organ, which is foreign to the host’s body.

People with allergies don’t necessarily have a weak immune system – they have one that is very protective. Their immune systems mistakenly identify normally harmless substances as a dangerous substance; antibodies fight these harmless “invaders” - dander, pollens, dust, etc. - causing the symptoms of allergy: cough, sneeze, runny nose, congestion, red and/or weepy eyes and fatigue. Our bodies are amazingly simple, yet at the same time, complex. Once the immune system sends out antibodies against a foreign invader, the body “remembers” this invader and the next time we’re exposed to that same substance our body releases antibodies again to fight off that substance, and so begins the **cycle of allergy symptoms**.

Vaccination against common diseases works because the body does remember foreign substances. Small amounts of a disease substance are introduced into the body and the body reacts by destroying the invader before the disease actually happens – it **protects us** if we’re exposed to the disease later. We’ve all had our vaccinations against measles, chicken pox, tetanus, diphtheria, whopping cough (pertussis), mumps, rubella, polio, hepatitis, pneumonia and hopefully, flu. This is the *same principle used in immunotherapy* or allergy shots; *small amounts of our individual allergens are injected into our bodies until we build up a resistance to them and this protects us from having allergy symptoms*.

Scientists are trying to discover why the immune system mistakes harmless substances as dangerous ones causing allergic reactions for more than 50 million adults in the USA. Until they unlock this mystery, one way *you can help reduce your reaction to allergens* is to **build and maintain a strong and healthy immune system**.

How can you build a strong immune system? **1)** Scientists now know emotional stress does affect our health and immune system efficiency. **Reduce the stress** in your life to help your body maintain not only physical but emotional health. **2)** Get at least **7-8 hours sleep** a night, especially during cold and flu season. When tired, the body can’t repair cells and we get sicker more quickly and can’t handle stress as well either. **3)** Choose to have a **strong social, emotional, physical and spiritual support system**. Physical touch like hugs or even shaking hands helps us have healthier and happier lives. **4) Moderate exercise** is more beneficial to increasing our disease immunity than working out too much, which actually runs down our immune systems. **5) Chicken soup**. Studies in *Chest* in 2000 showed that chicken soup improves our immunity levels and also helps us get well faster. **Other foods** that have a similar **beneficial affect** include fish, (high in omega-3) fruits and vegetables, especially blueberries and broccoli (high in anti-oxidants) and green tea. **6) Music**. Studies showed listening to music has a lasting effect on raising our IGA levels and helping our immune system fend-off disease. Choose to control your allergies.

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