

Boost Your Immune System with Yoga

It's that time of year again – the weather is getting colder and the days are getting shorter. The threat of colds and flu is being talked up on the evening news - Swine flu has been declared a world pandemic, and the government is recommending that people get vaccinated. Instead of rushing off to get injected with a vaccine that may or may not be safe or even prevent you from getting sick, try using yoga and other holistic methods to boost your immune system naturally.

What is the Immune System?

The immune system is a network of glands, nodes, and organs that work to protect the body from bacteria, viruses, fungi, and other harmful organisms. The immune system requires a constant supply of energy and nutrients to maintain optimum function and performance. Toxins in the environment and in food, poor diet, lack of or excessive exercise, and stress can all adversely affect the functions of the immune system.

Why Yoga Strengthens the Immune System

A strong immune system can wipe out a virus within a few days, preventing more extreme manifestations of the illness and in turn the immune system is reinforced. When the immune system isn't functioning optimally, the body becomes subject to illness, infections and health problems.

Yoga and breathing techniques can help relax the nervous system and boost an immune response. Both have been shown to directly impact the health of the immune system.

Yoga postures that open the chest and throat are good for stimulating the thymus, and inversion poses can help improve the flow of lymph and immune cells



through the body. Twisting poses and hip openers can help to activate the secondary organs of the immune system, including the spleen and the lymph nodes. Modified versions of forward bends, backbends can also lend a hand in supporting and strengthening the body's natural defenses.

Some other ways that yoga positively impacts the immune system include:

- Supports and stimulates the thymus gland
- Improves circulation
- Improves oxygen flow and aides the transfer of energy from nutrients to cells
- Improves the flow of the sinuses and flushes out mucous from the lungs
- Massages and rejuvenates internal organs
- Helps the body flush out toxins
- Open up energy pathways to allow the body to heal more efficiently

Try incorporating this pose flow into your home practice about 2-3x a week and see how your body responds. If you are new to yoga, seek out a studio/teacher for a beginner class – you will find that some of the poses suggested here are incorporated into a basic yoga class.

- Three-part Yogic Breath
- Legs Against the Wall
- Seated Side Bend
- Seated Twist
- Butterfly
- Seated Forward Fold
- Seated Wide Angle Forward Fold
- Lunge
- Lunge Twist
- Cobra
- Upward Facing Dog
- Bow Pose
- Child's Pose
- Downward Facing Dog

- Pigeon
- Frog
- Reclining Knees to Chest
- Happy Baby
- Lower Spinal Twist
- Bridge
- Shoulderstand
- Fish
- Corpse Pose

Other Holistic Tips to boost the Immune System

- **Get Enough Sleep and or/down time:** Most people get sick after the immune system is weakening from the stress of overworking, eating poorly, not getting enough sleep, and losing touch with their emotional health.
- **Stay Hydrated & Eat at Regular Intervals:** Drink a good amount of water every day and try to incorporate fresh seasonal fruits and vegetables as well as whole grains into your daily diet.
- **Emergen-C:** A great source of vitamin C. Use it as an after-workout electrolyte boost or before you hang out in crowded places.
- **ProBiotics:** Healthy bacteria that are necessary for good digestion – eat yogurt, drink kombucha or take a supplement from the health food store.
- **Echinacea:** An herbal remedy that helps the body fight cold and flu symptoms.
- **Goldenseal:** Prevent infection and reduces inflammation of mucous membranes under attack from cough or cold.
- **Zinc, Iron, B Vitamins:** Essential nutrients for a strong immune system.
- **Vitamin D:** Helps the body fight off viruses – get at least 15 minutes of unprotected sun a day between the hours of 9–3 or take a quality supplement. ▲