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Health & Well Being

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Flu Vaccinations

The Canadian Naturopathic Association believes it is in your best interest to become informed and treatment options before making any decisions. Review the following information to become better prepared to determine if the flu vaccination is the best option for you or family members.

Information on the influenza virus

- Millions of individuals develop the flu each year and only experience mild symptoms.
- There is a two day incubation period before symptoms of fever, cough, chills, sore throat, body aches, fatigue or headaches appear.
- Influenza virus spreads through coughing and sneezing, direct contact with contaminated surfaces and objects or unwashed hands.
- Flu symptoms usually subside after two to three days and disappear within a week.
- Once an individual has had the flu, their body will have produced antibodies that protect them from the same strain of virus for a prolonged period of time.
- Complications from influenza infection are very rare and may occur in individuals with an underlying medical condition, those greater than 65 years of age, and young children that have a predisposition to respiratory infections. Pneumonia is the primary complication of influenza and can result in hospitalization or death in those that are at extremely high risk for complications.

Information on the 'flu' vaccination

- The 'flu' vaccination, more correctly termed the influenza vaccination, is a vaccine against specific strains of the influenza virus.
- There are over 500 different viruses that can cause flu like symptoms. The vaccine is formulated from the three most common strains seen in the previous year.
- The influenza virus is constantly changing. A flu vaccine is only effective against the same strain of influenza virus used to develop the vaccine.
- It takes about two weeks after the flu shot to develop sufficiently high levels of antibodies to protect you from the influenza virus. These antibodies start to lose their effectiveness within a few months.
- According to Health Canada, the influenza vaccination is recommended for individuals at high risk for developing serious complications if they were to contract the influenza virus.
- High risk groups include all people aged 65 years or older, people with serious long-term health problems, diabetes, cancer, kidney disease, immunosuppressive disorders, children on long-term treatment with acetylsalicylic acid (ASA); as well as, health-care workers, residents / workers / volunteers of nursing homes, chronic-care facilities and retirement homes and women who will be more than 3 months pregnant during the influenza season.
- The research from Health Canada suggests that the flu vaccine that closely matches the current seasonal influenza strains temporarily prevents the flu in healthy persons less than 65 years old about 70% of the time.
- In individuals over 65 years of age the efficacy rate of the flu vaccine is reported to be less than 30%.
- 75% of individuals have prolonged (up to 2 days) soreness at the site of the injection.

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- Children are at the greatest risk of side effects including: fever, body aches, allergic reactions and potentially a severe paralytic illness.
- There is a rare risk of allergic reaction in individuals with an allergy to eggs. Warning signs include: breathing difficulties, hoarseness, wheezing, hives, paleness, pronounced weakness, rapid heartbeat, or dizziness.

Reported concerns and contraindications to the flu vaccine.

- According to the manufacturer of the vaccines, the flu vaccination should NOT be given to persons with an acute respiratory infection or with any other active infection or serious febrile (fever) illness.
- Vaccination is also not recommended for individuals who develop anaphylactic type reactions (hives, swelling of the mouth and throat, difficulty breathing, hypotension and shock) when they eat eggs. Immunization should be avoided in patients with an active neurological disorder until they are stabilized.
- The normal immune response following influenza vaccination may not develop properly in individuals undergoing immunosuppressive therapy. This includes those taking high doses of systemic steroids.
- Thimerosal, a mercury containing compound, is commonly used as a preservative in flu vaccines.
- There is a mild risk of a paralytic disorder called Guillain-Barre Syndrome.

Points to consider before making a decision on flu prevention.

- If you already have had the influenza virus this year, your body will have developed antibodies to the influenza virus. Antibodies, developed by the body, when one has actually had the flu are more robust than antibodies from the flu vaccine and will protect one for a longer time.
- The selection of the influenza strains that make up the vaccine is a hypothesis or guess. There is no way of knowing what strains will be the most prevalent in any given season.
- The flu vaccine only promotes temporary (about 2 months) immunity to the viral strains or closely related viral strains contained in the vaccine.
- The only way to acquire natural and long term immunity to a strain of the influenza virus is to recover naturally from the flu.
- The process that is used to destroy the viruses and create the vaccines often uses formaldehyde, heavy metals (mercury) and chemicals. There are concerns and need for more extensive research about the effect that these substances on the human body and the lack of long term safety associated with their use, especially with the potential for increased risks that yearly vaccinations might entail.
- Vaccinations prevent the body from naturally responding to external pathogens like viruses and bacteria. Individuals who regularly maintain a strong healthy immune system will protect themselves from any adverse effects of the flu, will build permanent immunity and will decrease the potential for developing unknown side effects from long term exposure to vaccinations.

The flu vaccination was developed by the allopathic health care system to decrease the risk of contracting the influenza virus. However, the best way of preventing any flu or complications from any flu is through prevention. The main focus of prevention needs to be on daily healthy habits that ensure an optimum immune system and overall health. A strong immune system is the most effective prevention strategy against the flu or any other virus.

If you have additional questions or concerns, please discuss these with your Naturopathic Doctor or other health practitioner.

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General Guidelines

The best protection from infectious diseases is a robust immune system and daily healthy habits. Some general recommendations for maintaining a strong immune system include:

Optimize the strength of your immune system by addressing outstanding health concerns with your Naturopathic Doctor or other health care provider.

- Work with your Naturopathic Doctor to identify the daily healthy regime or additional supplements best for your health;
- Address health concerns, supporting the healing power of the body, as they arise;
- Regular health care visits will assist you in identifying any underlying health concerns and regular blood work will indicate the health of your immune system.

Maintain optimal nutrient intake and a strong digestive function by:

- Eating 5 - 10 servings of fresh fruit and vegetables daily;
- Including garlic, onions, thyme and oregano in your cooking to boost the immune system and fight off viruses;
- Avoiding sugar, caffeine and alcohol; substances that reduce immune system function;
- Keeping hydrated by drinking 6 - 8 glasses of water per day. Because, people drink less in the winter, additional metabolic stress is placed on the liver, kidneys and the colon;
- Avoiding overeating, because it takes more energy to digest the food and can negatively impact the functioning of other body systems.

General healthy guidelines:

- Thoroughly wash your hands with soap and water regularly and avoid close contact with anyone who is not well. If you develop flu-like symptoms, stay home, limit exposure to others and allow your body time to recover.
- Wear adequate clothing. Limit the amount of exposed skin when outside temperatures are low and during the change of season, err on the side of being well dressed versus chilled;
- Obtain adequate rest and sleep;
- Exercise on a daily basis. Stretching, walking, swimming, working out at a health club, yoga or even dancing on a regular basis will assist in maintaining a healthy body;
- Spend five to ten minutes a day focusing on your breathing, spend twice as long on the exhalation as the inhalation;
- Practice stress reduction exercises like meditation, massage, or acupuncture as stress depresses the immune system;

If you develop flu-like symptoms, consult your Naturopathic Doctor or health care provider. For further information contact the Canadian Naturopathic Association at 416-496-8633 or www.naturopathicassoc.ca