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Natural medicine, a healthy choice

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The recent trend toward natural remedies inspires some people to think twice before walking into the nearest drugstore and grabbing a bottle of the cheapest medicine. The increasing availability of affordable homeopathic treatment has made it possible to stay healthy the natural way, even on a college student's budget.



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One of the many benefits of natural remedies is keeping unnecessary chemicals out of your body. Many ingredients for these natural treatments are found in most homes; it's medicine that can be found in the faucet, for example.

Stephanie Drauss, a naturopathic physician and founder of Stellaria Natural Health in Chicago, said a good way to jump-start the immune system is by drinking enough water, as hydration is key for making a body run smoothly. Because a well-balanced diet is also vital, Drauss suggested building meals from the vegetables onward.

"You should think, 'OK, I have veggies, maybe some fruit, some good protein, let's see what I can add on,'" she said.

Drauss recommended dark, leafy greens such as chard and kale, which are similar to spinach but have a more bitter taste.

The high fiber content in kale keeps it fresh for much longer than other greens, so it's a very convenient vegetable to have around for college students, Drauss said.

She added that although taking multivitamins is ideal if buying fresh foods is not within budget, as it often isn't for students, the vitamins should be of good quality.

"Vitamins are like fast food, in terms of quality versus price," Drauss said.

Poor quality vitamins often lack enough healthy fats or oils that are formulated to absorb into the body better and use unnecessary herbs as filler. It is important they contain 100 percent of the daily vitamins, such as A, D, C, B and calcium. Any not approved by the FDA should be avoided.

Drauss recommended exposure to at least a few minutes of sunlight each day. This helps our bodies produce Vitamin D, which aides in calcium absorption and immune system support.

"If you use public transportation, stand in the sun while waiting," Drauss said.

Ignoring symptoms or immediately reaching for pain medicine doesn't address what your body is going through, she said. Instead, take a minute and listen.

"Pay attention to what your body is telling you," Drauss advised. "Spend a little time with your symptom. Do you need to medicate it? Think of other possibilities."

Dr. Colleen Murphy, a naturopathic doctor in San Francisco, recommended everyone get tested for food allergies. Even food allergies that are not outwardly expressed take energy away from the immune system because it is working to create antibodies against the allergy, she said.

"A simple food allergy panel will help and empower you," Murphy said.

Making the immune system stronger makes it easier to fight colds and the flu, which translates to less of a need to miss homework or class.

Murphy explained that Vitamin C is one of the easiest and best vitamins to take.

"It's one of the cheapest immune-boosting supplements out there," she said.

Dr. Rajesh Vyas, a naturopathic doctor in Morgan Hill, Calif., said once you are sick, let the mucus drain out regularly to shorten the duration of the cold or flu.

"Don't sniffle, let it drain out," he said. "Don't blow your nose too hard and do only one side at a time."

Sniffing pushes the mucus into the sinuses, where it can thicken and lead to an infection, Vyas explained. If both nostrils are blown at once, there is no pressure release and more mucus is pushed back into the sinuses.

The biggest downside to natural medicine is most people assume there's no danger, Vyas said. In reality, he explained, toxic amounts can be taken.

"People feel that if it's natural, it's totally safe," Vyas said. "They think if a little is good, a lot must be better. In homeopathy, you don't need a large quantity."

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