Staying Strong
Herbs & Immunity

It is extremely important to note that those who have a compromised immune system are much more susceptible to infections of all kinds, including those caused by agents of biological terrorism. In the case of anthrax, the dose and concentration required for infection is decreased by up to 10-folds in individuals with weakened immune system. It is vital to stay healthy and maintain an optimal immune system. A healthy immune system decreases the risk of infection and improves the prognosis for recovery.

Which herbs have immune-enhancing effect?
- **Huang qi** (Radix Astragali membranacei): Modern research has confirmed repeatedly that Huang qi increases both specific and non-specific immunity. In a clinical trial of 115 leukopenic patients, it was found the use of Huang qi is associated with an "obvious rise of the white blood cell (WBC) count" with a dose-dependent relationship. In addition, Huang qi works well with concurrent drug therapy in enhancing the overall effectiveness of the treatment. Huang qi potentiates the anti-tumor effect of chemotherapy drugs, while reversing the drug-induced immune suppression. Lastly, Huang qi also demonstrates anti-cancer activity as it increases the content of cAMP and inhibits the growth of tumor cells.

- **Ling zhi** (Ganoderma Lucidum): It has been demonstrated in various clinical studies that Ling zhi enhances the immune system. The specific effects of Ling zhi include an increase in monocytes, macrophages and T lymphocytes. In addition, there is also an increased production of cytokine, interleukin, tumor necrosis factor and interferon. Furthermore, Ling zhi has a broad spectrum of anti-bacterial activities and inhibits the growth of pneumococi, streptococi (type A), staphylococci, E. coli, B. dysenteriae, pseudomonas, etc.

- **Dong chong xia cao** (Cordyceps Sinensis): It enhances overall immunity by increasing the number of lymphocytes and natural killer cells and the production of interleukin, interferon and tumor necrosis factor.

In addition, Dong chong xia cao stimulates and increases the phagocytic activities of macrophages against foreign substances. This effect is further potentiated with the addition of Huang qi and Ren shen (Radix Ginseng). Huang qi is extremely effective in enhancing the immune system and reversing immune deficiency. Ren shen also has immune-enhancing effect by increasing the function of the reticuloendothelial system and the total count of IgM. In one clinical study, 52 cancer patients who have leukopenia caused by chemotherapy were able to continue and complete the entire course of chemotherapy treatment with the intake of Ren shen to prevent bone marrow suppression.

—John Chen, PharmD, PhD

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