

Playing Defense

NOW THAT WE'VE LEARNED THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE IMMUNE SYSTEM, BIANCA GILLETT DISCUSSES SOME OF THE BEST WAYS TO COMBAT STRESS AND KEEP YOUR BODY HEALTHY.

BY ASHLEY RYAN

In October, Bianca Gillett, Newport Beach Country Club's director of recreation, took our readers on a journey to detail how the immune system works and what types of things can weaken it, making it easier to contract illnesses such as COVID-19, influenza, the common cold and more. According to Gillett, one factor that impacts the immune system the most is something we all face: stress. "Stress management is extremely important

for multiple reasons," Gillett says. "One, obviously, is for health reasons—just to be preventative. The less stress we have in our lives, the longer, happier, healthier bodies we can keep. It's also just important for quality of life. It improves everything—mind, body and spirit—if we reduce stress."

Read on to discover her tips for ridding your body of stress and, in turn, enjoying a happier mind, body and spirit.



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1. Get Outside in the Sun

The sun is the most natural form of vitamin D, which helps produce healthy white blood cells. "Having a higher vitamin D level is just a natural preventative break to help you not get COVID-19 or reduce the symptoms," Gillett adds. "People with lower vitamin D values are more susceptible and have more symptoms."

2. Stay Active

It doesn't matter how, but it's important to maintain an exercise routine and stay moving. "When you work out, you get your lymphatic system moving to kind of flush out the bad bacteria that your T cells and B cells work so hard to get rid of," she explains.

3. Eat a Healthy Diet

Gut health and immune health are greatly intertwined, so eating a wide variety of food—especially an organic, rainbow-colored medley of vegetables—can help keep your immune system up. This is a natural way of getting many of the nutrients your body needs to stay healthy.

4. Avoid Unhealthy Habits

There are a few things that people normally turn to when they're stressed or tired—an alcoholic drink, caffeine, smoking or even eating too much food—that can be detrimental to the immune system. "I know it's tempting, but in the long run, it's going to have the worst effect," Gillett says.

5. Meditation

Our minds tend to overthink and not make very good choices when we're facing pressure or tension. One natural way to increase focus and quiet the mind is through meditation. "Meditation helps ground us and bring us back to the present moment," Gillett notes.

6. Yoga

Similar to meditation, yoga helps to relax your mind, but it has plenty of physical benefits as well, including releasing of muscles, as that's where we tend to carry a lot of stress in our bodies. Yoga also provides a great community for people who get to know their classmates.

7. Connect With Others

Laughing is a natural positive physical change that happens in the body, which fires up and cools down our stress response. In addition, Gillett says, "As human beings, we're naturally meant for connection so getting fulfillment from the presence of the people we love is a way that the body suppresses that cortisol system." Visit with friends, watch a funny movie or do anything that brings you general joy and happiness.

8. Place Boundaries

More and more doctors are studying the emotional effects of how the immune system responds to lack of boundaries. "Individuals who tend to be a little more on the empathetic side and lack boundaries will have more physical complications when they are older, because of that stress of not asserting yourself or putting yourself first," she explains. She suggests journaling to reflect or seeking counseling to learn how to maintain healthy boundaries.

9. Get Enough Sleep

"I cannot stress this enough—people do not understand the importance of sleep as much as they should," Gillett says, recommending about seven to eight hours per night in order to let your body process and restore everything from the immune system to the organs and their tissues. "If we don't get the amount of sleep we need, it affects our mood, our energy level, our concentration—just overall functioning."

10. Be Creative

Finding your creative side doing something you enjoy can have a major impact, providing a mental distraction while also reducing muscle tension and decreasing stress levels. You can draw, color, read, paint or even listen to music. "I'm the person with a playlist for certain moods or activities so that's helpful for me," Gillett notes. "Or even emotions that I'm not really feeling or suppressing, music helps bring that out for me."

SUPPLEMENTAL SIDEKICKS

In addition to working out, eating healthy and connecting with others, Gillett recommends ensuring that your body has enough vitamins and minerals to stay healthy.

"If you get your bloodwork done and you have extremely high levels of cortisol, there's a company called Thorne and they have a supplement [called Adrenal Cortex that can be] used to reduce stress," Gillett says.

In addition, she says your immune system can be thought of like a football team, with certain vitamins serving as your offensive linemen.

"So you and your immune system are the quarterback, and these supplements are trying to keep you safe—and that's vitamin D, vitamin C and vitamin A."

She says she takes those vitamins throughout the year as a preventative measure and that, if you're not deficient in any of the three, it can help you recover sooner from even the common cold.



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