



Autoimmune disorders

What is an auto-immune disorder/disease?

Autoimmunity is the failure of an organism in recognizing its own constituent parts as *self*, thus leading to an immune response against its own cells and tissues. Any disease that results from such an aberrant immune response is termed an autoimmune disease. –Wiki

Examples of a few well known auto-immune diseases: Diabetes type 1, Celiac, Rheumatoid Arthritis, Crohn's and Hashimoto's.

What is the standard medical treatment?

Although there are many different treatments used, often one thing stands out –suppression of the immune system. Typically some form of steroids are used to accomplish this. It's not hard to see why this can help temporarily, but suppressing the immune system causes some serious problems. If you're fighting off one illness and now you have a low functioning immune system, you're quite vulnerable to other illnesses! Also, this does nothing to address underlying causes.

What is the natural approach?

Again, each disease can require unique treatments, but one commonality ties them all together -Balance the immune system and inflammation levels.

Within natural medicine, one of the biggest controversies is that immune supportive herbs/ingredients will increase symptoms and their severity. This belief persists, although there is little to no research to confirm this. In fact, "Herbal Ed" (Herbalist Ed Smith and the co-founder of Herb Pharm) points out that in the early 1900's, American MD's were using Echinacea to treat autoimmune disorders! These doctors prescribed extensive doses, yet saw no indication that Echinacea was worsening their patient's symptoms.

The controversy and confusion of using immune supportive for auto-immune disorders is based on an assumption –a big assumption! If something "boosts" the immune system, then it will by definition make auto-immune symptoms worse. We need to lose the word "boost" from our vocabulary. When we look at how most immune supportive ingredients actually work, it's that they typically optimize immune function and increase the immune system's "intelligence" –meaning these ingredients help the immune system work smarter, not haphazardly stronger.

Where do I start?

An essential place to start is "basic" nutrition. Although often overlooked and its importance is downplayed, ensuring the body has the crucial nutrients to function normally is of the utmost

importance. Next, identify any specific problem areas like sleep, digestion and exercise. Keep in mind throughout this process that you need to stay in communication with your health care professional. Be sure to make them aware of any changes in your lifestyle and diet, including new supplements.

For foundational support, a quality multivitamin, fish oil and anti-inflammatory supplements are a solid base. In many cases, individuals in greater need would do well to take higher potencies of fish oil and should look to anti-inflammatory ingredients like Turmeric, Boswellia, Ginger, Rosemary, Holy Basil and enhanced absorption Curcumin. Be sure to seek out high quality companies that ensure superior products, especially those offering clinical studies backing their products. These foundational items are wonderful because they're something nearly everyone will benefit from. Also, with diseases that have hard to detect underlying causes, it's smart to ensure nutritional deficiencies aren't the cause or playing a contributing role –Omega-3s are a great example of this.

From there, the broad approaches that fit and are safe for everyone get a little trickier. One of the few ingredients that has a well-established role at truly balancing the immune system is the mushroom Reishi. Studies have shown that Reishi and other medicinal mushrooms can help “calm down” an overactive immune system, as well as “boost” an underactive one.

The main reason it can “get tricky” to find immune support is because although there are many other immune ingredients that may help, few have extensive studies behind them confirming safety. So do your homework on all new ingredients, again keeping your practitioner informed of all changes.

Further thoughts:

Many auto-immune disorders are accompanied by gut inflammation. That's something some of the aforementioned anti-inflammatory herbs can help with, but the addition of probiotics is a great idea. Not only can they improve overall gut health, but remember, a large portion of the immune system resides in the gut. If the gut is not a healthy and happy place to live, the immune system will be affected.

Also, break down the components of your specific symptoms. While tackling symptoms may not always help the root cause, the potential for better day to day life can be worth the effort.

-Do you have skin problems? Emu oil, Omega 7, Silica and other skin supportive ingredients.

-Do you experience joint pain? Topricin, Hyaluronic Acid, Glucosamine, etc.

-Low energy? Rhodiola, Ginseng, Cordyceps, etc.

These are just some examples, but it's easy to add on to the foundational items with things that are tailored to your specific health concerns.

There are endless other factors we could address, but this is a great beginning, good luck!