

him and giving it to her 13-month-old daughter. "If I got the flu, I could give it to both of them. I never got the flu shot before I had kids. Now I'm more cautious." Her husband and children also got flu shots.

This year, there is a new high-dose influenza vaccine for people 65 years of age and older. The elderly have a weaker immune response to vaccines and can have the most severe complications from influenza.

If you prefer an alternative to the seasonal flu shot, the Center for Natural Medicine in Middleton offers a homeopathic flu prevention program. A dose of homeopathic flu preventative is a much smaller dose of the flu shot.

"Look at yourself as an individual when making health decisions about immunizations," says Dr. Jill Evenson, owner and naturopathic doctor at the center. "It's a bigger question than just whether to get a flu shot or not. Lawmakers set policy for the health of the general public so that fewer people get the flu, but it may not be the best choice for you."

There are many things you can do to strengthen your immune system, including: wash your hands frequently; go to bed early, especially in flu season; drink plenty of water; eat right; exercise; and get outside every day.

"Get help from a medical professional to assist you in making decisions and assessing your risk factors," Evenson advises. "Natural medicine is an important resource that's been clinically shown to be as similarly effective as the flu shot and reduces possible harm to the immune system."

Whatever you decide, knowing that you and your family are protected against the flu virus will let you fully enjoy the holiday season in good health and cheer. *mb*

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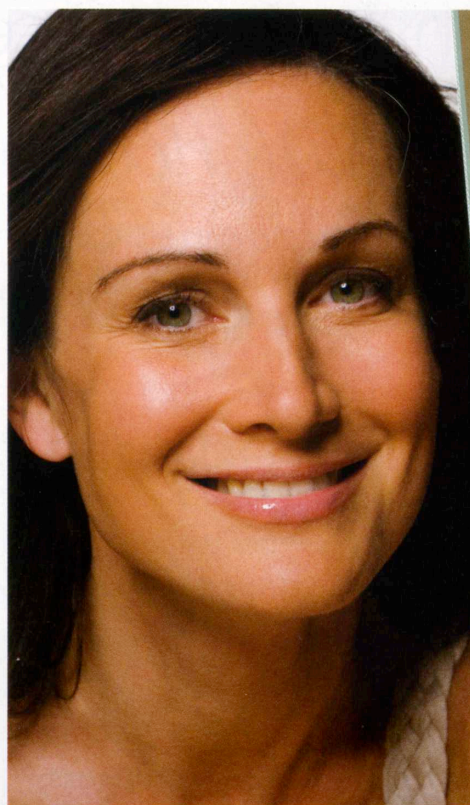


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