



# Patient Power

## How Can Hodgkin Lymphoma Patients Strengthen Their Immune System?

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**Beth Probert:**

How do I make my immune system stronger? And I realize that's a really broad question, but maybe you can trim it down a little bit.

**Dr. Burke:**

No, it's actually a very common question that I face in clinic, you know, can I do with my immune system? I think it's important to distinguish what patients think of as making their immune system stronger by taking vitamins and eating healthy and exercising, that's one thing. And then the immune-stimulating checkpoint inhibitors, those are really dramatically different. Those are very serious drugs with proven benefits to patients with relapsed Hodgkin lymphoma, but very significant risks. And basically you could get—you know, overstimulation of your immune system can damage any organ in your whole body and in the worst-case scenario lead to death. So these are not trivial drugs, and that's a much different thing. It's stimulating the immune system, but that's not something that should be tried at home by anybody other than an oncology professional.

So I think, you know, can you stimulate your immune system by things like diet and exercise, and that's kind of the vibe I think the question is leaning toward, I'm not sure there is too much you can do. The science behind this is that these dang cancer cells called Reed-Sternberg cells are very smart, and what they have in them is these mutations in their genes that cause these cancer cells to be inherently resistant to a patient's own immune system. So these cancer cells are making these proteins on the surface of the cell that is preventing the T cell from killing it.

And what we do with these checkpoint inhibitors is release these T cells, make them more powerful and basically release this inhibitory effect that the cancer cells have on the T cells so then the T cells can actually come in and kill them. But can a human being naturally make that process happen? To my knowledge, no. We know how to do it better now with drugs, but I'm not sure that a patient can do that on their own, no.

**Beth Probert:**

That was a really great understanding, and thank goodness we do have the drugs that can stimulate that. That's wonderful.

**Dr. Burke:**

Big leap forward in Hodgkin lymphoma.

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