

Eating Your Way to a Strong Immune System

Enhancing immunity is a thriving topic in the nutraceutical market today.

Nutritionists agree that a poor diet is a huge contributing factor to people becoming susceptible to colds and flu. There is no cure for the common cold, flu or Covid 19, that's blighting our society as we speak. However, eating well may help you avoid getting sick, and if nothing else, reduce your number of trips to the pharmacy. There are many supplements you can buy with varying degrees of efficacy and price, but being mindful of what you eat, can provide you with all the support you need for a healthy immune system.

VITAMIN C

Vitamin C tops the list of immune boosters. There has been more research about the immune boosting effects of vitamin C than perhaps any other nutrient. Vitamin C is available naturally in many fruits and vegetables.

Unlike most animals that produce their own vitamin C, the human body does not synthesize any. Vitamin C has substantial antiviral and antibacterial benefits, but it's particularly well-known for its ability to build up host resistance. The most abundant natural food sources of vitamin C are guava, papaya, strawberries, kiwi, cantaloupe, orange and grapefruit.

PROBIOTICS

The live cultures found in yoghurt, particularly *Lactobacillus* and *Bifidobacteria*, are key in enhancing immunity, particularly as it's thought that 80% of the immune system's function

comes from the gut. Having a healthy supply of gut flora increases a person's white blood cell production and activity. They may also boost immunity while you are taking antibiotics, and they supply added protection to those who may have a compromised immune system. Probiotic rich foods are yogurt, kefir, select cheeses and milk, sauerkraut, kim chi and tempeh, or you can take bioacidophilus supplements.

BONE BROTH

Chicken soup isn't just good for the soul, there's a reason why it's become part of health-folklore, particularly when you're feeling under the weather. All bone broths – beef, chicken, fish, and lamb are nutrient-dense, easy to digest, rich in flavour and can boost healing.

The long slow simmering of a protein causes the bones and ligaments to release healing compounds like collagen, proline, glycine and glutamine that have a range of different health benefits. The list of immune boosting benefits from bone broth are long, including gut health (covered in more detail above), cell metabolism and repair, detoxifying, promotion of probiotic balance, and regeneration of damaged cells.

HIGH FIBRE GRAINS

Oats and barley in particular contain beta-glucan, a type of fibre with antimicrobial and antioxidant capabilities. They enhance resistance to various fungal, bacterial and viral diseases. Beta-glucan is also found in protective amounts in shiitake and maitake mushrooms. Beta-glucan enhances

immunity, similarly to echinacea and astragalus root. Beta-glucan binds to white blood cells and activates anti-infection activity.

VITAMIN E

Vitamin E has been studied for its production of natural killer B-cells, or B-lymphocytes, a type of white blood cell that produces antibodies that destroy bacteria. The highest vitamin E foods are green leafy vegetables, sunflower seeds, almonds and blueberries.

ZINC

Zinc is a mineral which increases the production of white blood cells. Always include zinc from food sources rather than in a supplement form. As little as 15 to 25 milligrams a day will help to support immune function. Some of the top zinc foods are oyster, crab, and grass-fed beef as well as beans, chickpeas and nuts.

OMEGA-3 FATTY ACIDS

Omega-3 fats reduce inflammation, increasing airflow and protecting the lungs from colds and respiratory infections. The omega-3 fatty acids in ground flaxseed and fish such as, salmon, tuna, sole, flounder, sardines, herring and mackerel, act as immune boosters by increasing the activity of phagocytes, the white blood cells that destroy bacteria. Other omega 3 rich foods are tofu, edamame and walnuts.

BETA CAROTENE

Research has shown that the antioxidant beta carotene can increase the number of natural killer T-cells in our immune system. Beta carotene is a powerful antioxidant that mops up excess free radicals that can accelerate illness. This nutrient is found in carrots and sweet potatoes.





GARLIC

Garlic is known for its antibacterial, antiviral, antifungal and immune-boosting effects. Garlic stimulates the production of white blood cells and increases the efficiency of antibody production. The immune-boosting properties of garlic seem to be due to its sulfur-containing compounds. Garlic can also act as an antioxidant that reduces the build-up of free radicals in the bloodstream.



MUSHROOMS

Mushrooms are antioxidant-rich and very high in selenium. Research has shown that selenium can reduce the risk of developing severe flu. Mushrooms are also recognized for their antiviral, antibacterial, and anti-tumour effects. White button mushrooms in particular, have noticeably greater immune boosting effects than other mushrooms such as oyster and shiitake.



TEA

The amino acid responsible for immune boosting components in tea is, L-theanine. It is abundant in both black and green tea. Many of us already know it's a good idea to drink green tea to help fight disease, new research is also including white tea, for its strong ability to destroy the organisms that cause disease.



WATER

Last but not least, one of the most important immune-boosting ingredients, is simple old-fashioned water. Staying well-hydrated is one of the key factors in preventing (as well as recovering from) virus infections. Healthy hydration levels can help your nose by maintaining the mucous membrane and decreasing irritation when coughing, sneezing and even just breathing. Dehydrating on the other hand leads to a loss of key electrolytes in the body such as sodium, potassium and chloride which are key for health and make you more vulnerable to infection.

Being well-hydrated also helps you to absorb the nutrients from your food, much more efficiently.

AND HERE'S WHAT TO TRY AND REDUCE THE INTAKE OF

Not only should you boost your intake of certain nutrients, but there are certain things you should do your best to avoid to stay healthy, especially in excessive amounts.

1. Sugar

Eating or drinking too much refined sugar, can reduce the ability of white blood cells to kill germs. The immune-suppressing effect of sugar starts immediately after ingestion and may strengthen throughout the day. Excessive refined sugar intake can reduce the responsiveness of your immune cells and lower your immune defence.



2. Alcohol

Excessive alcohol intake can harm the body's immune system. Alcohol ingestion deprives the body of protective nutrients, leaving it susceptible to invaders. High doses of alcohol suppress the ability of the white blood cells to multiply and it inhibits the action of natural killer cells. Damage to the immune system increases in proportion to the quantity of alcohol consumed. Amounts of alcohol that are enough to cause intoxication are also enough to suppress immunity.



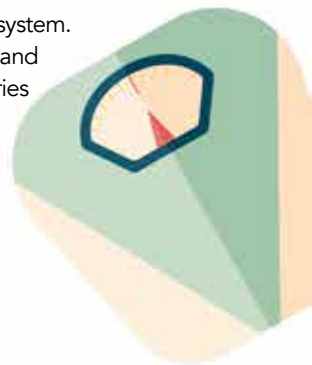
3. Processed Food

Foods that contain synthetic colours, dyes, artificial sweeteners, flavours and texturizers can decrease your immunity and be a factor in increasing your body's susceptibility to cold and flu viruses.



4. Weight Gain

Being overweight by even 10 pounds may also suppress the immune system. Excessive weight may affect the ability of white blood cells to multiply and produce antibodies. Since the excessive consumption of fats and calories can lessen your immune system, it is important to shape your daily intake in such a way that you can become satisfied without overeating.



To stay healthy and protect yourself against cold and flu viruses, focus on eating a diet that contains a variety of fruits and vegetables. These foods ensure that you get the bioflavonoids needed to boost the immune system. If you can prioritise certified organic foods as these should be free from pesticides, heavy metals, and residues which are among the most immune-damaging molecules we can ingest. Where possible drink filtered water to avoid these same immune-suppressing factors commonly found in most tap water.



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