

Nutrition for the Immune System



Strength from Within

The immune system is our body's defense against germs, viruses, and other diseases. In many ways it functions much like our military. When a threat is identified, the troops are sent out to fight. It's a complicated system with many parts that require several resources to keep it strong. Nutrition plays an important role in keeping the immune system strong and ready to fight. Here are seven nutrients that play an important role in the immune system.

The Power of Nutrients

PROTEIN

Key Functions: helps form cells, promotes and supports healing and recovery

Sources: lean meats, seafood, poultry, eggs, beans, nuts, seeds

VITAMIN A

Key Functions: tissue repair, fights infection

Sources: sweet potatoes, carrots, peppers, apricots, broccoli, spinach, eggs

VITAMIN C

Key Functions: formation of important immune system defenders, including antibodies and white blood cells

Sources: oranges, grapefruit, tangerines, papaya, berries, peppers, broccoli

VITAMIN E

Key Functions: antioxidant, protects against cell damage, fights infection

Sources: sunflower seeds, almonds, peanut butter, wheat germ, broccoli, spinach, fortified cereals

VITAMIN B6

Key Functions: key player in important cell reactions and communications

Sources: chickpeas, fish, poultry, potatoes, bananas

VITAMIN B12

Key Functions: helps produce white blood cells

Sources: fish, poultry, beef, eggs, milk, fortified cereals, fortified plant-based milks

ZINC

Key Functions: activates the white blood cells that attack targeted invaders, fights infection, promotes and supports healing

Sources: oysters, lean meats, poultry, seafood, milk, whole grains, beans, nuts, seeds

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Eating right can strengthen your health and immunity from within, but that's not the primary way to protect yourself from COVID-19. The CDC recommends frequent hand washing, not touching your face, sanitizing common objects and practicing social distancing. Taking care of yourself through good nutrition is important so that you are best equipped to fight this or any infection. Here are some select foods and healthy habits that play an important role in the immune system.



Five Ways to Support a Healthy Immune System

- **Gobble Up Garlic.**

Studies show that garlic has protective properties that can assist the body in fighting off bacteria and viruses. Add plenty of garlic to your dishes to enhance flavor and boost immunity. Don't be shy in adding garlic to soups, stews, sauces, hummus and roasted vegetables!

- **Get Quality Sleep.**

If you aren't getting enough shut-eye, this can negatively impact your immune system. The immune system undergoes necessary restoration and repair while you are sleeping. The optimal amount of sleep for an adult is seven to nine hours per night.

- **Move Your Body.**

Exercise is good for every cell, organ and system in your body, including the immune system. It is also an effective way to manage stress. When you exercise you release stress hormones like adrenaline and cortisol and replace them with feel-good hormones. Get outside and walk, run or go for a bike ride. Fresh air is also good for your mental and physical well-being!

- **Stay Hydrated.**

Be sure to drink plenty of fluids to ensure you are well hydrated. Adequate hydration is essential to keep all of your organ systems working smoothly and effectively. Drink plenty of water and eat lots of fruits and vegetables - these foods are mostly water, so in addition to providing essential nutrients, they help keep you hydrated, too!

- **Limit Alcohol & Processed Foods.**

This should come as no surprise since alcohol and processed foods can displace healthy and important foods and nutrients. Alcohol can interfere with important immune system functions and negatively affect sleep quality.