
Boost your Immune System

The immune system is constantly on the alert to identify and destroy anything that threatens to attack the body and cause illness – viruses, bacteria and infections. We have the physical barrier of the skin, specialised white blood cells, antibodies and ‘friendly’ bacteria in the gut.

To function optimally, the immune system requires many nutrients; vitamins, minerals, adequate sleep (6-8hrs), relaxation and regular exercise (excessive exercise can have the opposite effect). A lack of nutrients, sleep, excess weight, prolonged stress, sugar, pollution and medication can all impair the immune system.

Tips to look after your immune system:

1. Eat plenty of **fresh fruits, vegetables and wholegrains** – rich in vitamins, minerals, fibre and antioxidants. Choose organic and in season if possible, ensure you have a wide range of colours and varieties to provide the body with a range of different nutrients.
2. **Onions and garlic** act as natural antibacterial and antiviral agents. Include them in savoury dishes and salads and if your social life allows, have raw onions in salads.
3. **Regular exercise**, this helps with weight management and can help boost antibody production. Obesity is associated with a higher incidence of infection, slower recovery and poor antibody response. Exercise outside when possible to get some fresh air and sunshine.
4. **Avoid prolonged stress**, this can slow wound healing, reduce the immune response and the ability to form antibodies. Take time to relax and laugh.
5. **Get enough sleep**, especially when the body is fighting infection. Levels of antibodies have been shown to be lower in those who miss a night’s sleep or have sleep problems.
6. **Reduce immune-depressors** – coffee, tea, cigarettes, alcohol, sugar, refined processed foods – these all rob the body of nutrients while giving it nothing in return.
7. Use **antibiotics as a last resort**, they destroy good and bad bacteria, so follow a course of treatment with probiotics to re-establish the good bacteria.
8. Eat plain **live yoghurt** daily (if not avoiding dairy) to maintain levels of friendly bacteria in the gut. This is known as ‘gut flora’ and forms a very large part of the immune system, about 70-80%!! Eating plenty of fruits, vegetables and whole grains also provides these friendly bacteria with food.
9. Drink at least 1.5-2 litres of filtered or bottled, non-carbonated **water** – more when exercising, recovering from illness or if the weather is very hot.

10. Should you fall prey to an illness, or feel the first signs of a cold, a therapeutic dose of certain nutrients can help reduce the length and severity. And **remember to rest**, if you feel weak, this is your body's way of letting you know that you need to slow down and reserve energy for the recovery and repair processes.
11. **Keep clean.** Your mother was right, wash your hands; one of the fastest ways to pass on or pick up germs is from door handles and surfaces that others have touched; think how many other hands have touched doors in public places, trolleys in the supermarket, railings and handles etc, get into the habit of washing your hands especially after using the bathroom and before eating.

Immune boosting nutrients:

- **Vitamin A** – an infection-fighting vitamin, needed for the health of mucous membranes. Those who are pregnant or trying to conceive should not exceed 10,000iu per day.
- **Vitamin C** – needed for antibody production. 1-2gms every 4hrs. High doses can cause diarrhoea, should this happen, simply reduce the dose. High doses should not be taken if you are on the contraceptive pill or whilst pregnant.
- **Vitamin E** – necessary for antibody response, it works with selenium to improve resistance to infection and protect the body from air-borne pollution.
- **Zinc** – an antiviral mineral that boosts the immune response, promotes healing and is needed for the production of antibodies and resistance to infection.
- **Sambucol** – for respiratory tract infections and headaches associated with colds.
- **Echinacea** (alcohol-free) to boost the immune system and keep viruses from multiplying. Do not take for more than one week at a time, or if you are pregnant or nursing.

There are many more, but these are the most common ones.