

Viva!

H E A L T H

FEEDING YOU THE FACTS

SUPPORT YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM



Your immune system protects you round-the-clock but what you eat can have a considerable effect. You can make it sharper by eating well and looking after yourself – or you can overload and weaken it.

EAT FRESH AND WHOLESOME FOODS

Focus on fruit and vegetables, pulses, wholegrains, nuts and seeds – they are all full of vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, protein and healthy fats. They give your body what it needs to stay strong. Fruit is best eaten fresh, frozen or blended in a fresh smoothie. Vegetables are the most powerful either raw or lightly cooked.

All these fibre-rich plant foods promote the good bacteria in your gut, which can help support your immune system.

UPGRADE YOUR DIET

Garlic, ginger and turmeric offer extra help when it comes to the immune system. Garlic stimulates your white blood cells – immune system soldiers – supercharging their powers. It also contains phytochemicals which help to fight both infection and inflammation in the body.

Ginger and turmeric contain strong antioxidants, help to combat inflammation and have antimicrobial properties. Ginger is best fresh while you can use turmeric as a powder. Always pair turmeric with black pepper to absorb more of turmeric's wonder compound – curcumin.

PICK HEALTHY PROTEIN SOURCES

Protein is vital to strong immunity and it just so happens that the best protein sources – pulses, nuts and seeds – are also rich in vitamins and minerals. So meals like chickpea curry, lentil dhal, tomato and lentil soup, bean chilli, tofu stir-fry or falafel wrap are perfect options. Add a snack of nuts and seeds, or fruit slices with nut butter and you'll be well-nourished.

REMEMBER OMEGA-3S

Omega-3 fats are essential for your health and they are also anti-inflammatory. A heaped tablespoon of chia seeds, ground flaxseed, hempseed or a handful of walnuts will provide a daily dose. Alternatively, take a vegan omega-3 supplement made from microalgae.

AVOID FOODS THAT CAN CAUSE HARM

Limit sugar, fizzy drinks, sweets, processed snacks, white flour products and sweetened cereal products. Those weaken your immune system because they are pro-inflammatory, making your body work harder to process it all. The same applies to animal products, such as meat, dairy and eggs.

TOP UP YOUR VITAMINS

Vitamin D is very important for your immune system. Your skin makes it when exposed to sunlight but it can't always make enough. Taking a supplement is recommended from October to April – or all year round if you always protect your skin. **Ten micrograms (400 IU)** daily is enough and make sure it's suitable for vegans.

Vitamin B12 is also vital for your health – take **50 micrograms** daily or **2,000 micrograms** weekly.

PAY ATTENTION TO ZINC

Zinc is a mineral crucial for a healthy immune system so make sure these foods make an appearance on your daily menu: pumpkin seeds, lentils, tofu, tempeh, wholemeal pasta, wholegrains or wheat germ.

DRINK UP

You need water to keep up the volume of lymph, a liquid that moves white blood cells (infection-fighting cells) around your body. If you drink too little, the movement of lymph slows down and it weakens your immune system. Plain water or unsweetened tea are best.

UNWIND

Short-term stress isn't harmful but long-term stress is. It can actively weaken your immune system. While you cannot always control stressful situations, you can learn stress-management techniques such as breathing exercises, yoga, Tai Chi or meditation that help you deal with difficult times. Even just taking a walk can help.

SLEEP WELL

Sleep is a time for physical and mental recovery and is important for your immune system. People who sleep less than six hours a night are more prone to infections. Aim for at least seven hours!

