



Caring • Committed • Creative

Healthy Eating & Your Immune System

A healthy immune system is important to help fight off viruses. It is your body's major safeguard ready to ward off attacks from viruses and help destroy them if they get in. Having a healthy diet plays an important role in having a healthy immune system. Let's take a look at some ways we can strengthen our immune system through diet.

Healthy Diet & Viruses

- A healthy diet is in important for a strong immune system, however, to date there is no single food or supplement that can prevent or treat viruses such as COVID-19
- Knowing this, a good course of action would be following Canada's Food Guide recommendations. Specifically, a diet rich in fruit and vegetables, protein and while grain foods
- This will help you consume the many essential nutrients that are needed for the functioning of a healthy immune system.

Key Nutrients to Build, Maintain & Strengthen a Healthy Immune System

Vitamin C: Vitamin C is a water soluble vitamin that can help protect the body from infections. It is found in many fruits and vegetables. You need about 2000 mg per day to help fight or reduce the symptoms. Getting your Vitamin C intake is easy.

- Having a glass of orange juice or whole fruit at breakfast (1 large orange ~98 mg, Kiwi 75 mg)
- Choosing some vegetables for soup or salad at lunch (raw peppers ½ cup 101-144 mg, cooked broccoli ½ cup 54 mg)
- 1 cup of strawberries for dessert (95 mg)



Note: Our bodies do not store extra Vitamin C. Whatever we don't need is removed in our urine. Which means, we need to eat Vitamin C rich foods every day to ensure our body gets the daily dose. If you don't eat enough vitamin C-rich foods, you can also take a supplement.

Zinc: Zinc is a mineral that supports T-cells which is essential for the development and functioning of the immune system. It can be found in seafood, beef, beans, lentils, seeds and peanut butter. The recommended dose is not yet known. It is not safe to take more than 40 milligrams of zinc per day.

Selenium: Selenium is an antioxidant that works with Vitamin E to keep you healthy. It is found in seafood, whole grain, meats and nuts. There are currently no recommendations for use of supplements.

Vitamin D: Vitamin D is a fat soluble vitamin that can help protect the body from infections. It is not found in many foods, however it can be found in cow's milk, fatty fish, egg yolks, and fortified items such as orange juice, soy & rice beverages and yogurts. The recommended intake for Vitamin D is 600IU daily if you are between 19-70 years of age. If you are over 50 years of age, it is recommended to take a Vitamin D supplement of 400 IU daily *in addition* to eating vitamin D rich foods. You can visit your doctor to find out your vitamin D levels.

Probiotics: Probiotics are good bacteria that can support good gut health and can help keep your immune system healthy. Probiotics can be found in food items such as fermented milk and some yogurts. It is important to check the label for to ensure these food items contain probiotics. At this time, more research is required for the recommendation for the *amount* and *type* of supplement required that may be helpful.



Remember: It is always recommended to talk to your doctor before taking any supplements to know what the right fit is for you. If you do take supplements make sure they have a Natural Product Number (NPN) from Health Canada.

Other Key Factors to Maintain and Strengthen Your Immune System

- Adequate sleep – try to aim for 7 to 8 hours each night
- Manage stress
 - Yoga or meditation for 20 mins
 - Going for a walk while practicing safe distancing
 - Listening to your favourite music
 - Reading in silence
 - Virtual chats with friends
- Keep hydrated
- Avoid smoking
- Limit drinking alcohol
- Engage in Physical Activity – try to achieve at least 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity aerobic activity per week and add muscle and bone strengthening at least 2 days per week
- Wash your hands – wash your hands often with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer



In closing...

There are many key nutrients that play a role with the functioning to ensure of healthy immune system. Therefore, we encourage eating a well-balanced diet with a variety of nutrient rich foods each day along with other healthy lifestyle choices.

References

(1) <https://www.bayshore.ca/2018/02/05/tips-for-staying-healthy-in-cold-and-flu-season/> (2) <https://www.unlockfood.ca/en/Articles/Immune-System/Get-The-Facts-On-The-Immune-System.aspx> (3) Tips for staying well during cold and flu season, 2011, PEN, Dietitians of Canada (4) https://www.csep.ca/CMFiles/Guidelines/CSEP_PAGuidelines_adults_en.pdf (5) <https://www.ontario.ca/page/covid-19-stop-spread> (6) <https://www.unlockfood.ca/en/Articles/Vitamins-and-Minerals/What-you-need-to-know-about-Vitamin-D.aspx> (7) Food sources of zinc, 2019, PEN, Dietitians of Canada (8) Food sources of selenium, 2016, PEN, Dietitians of Canada (9) Food sources of vitamin C, 2016, PEN, Dietitians of Canada (10) Eating habits for a healthy immune system, 2020, PEN, Dietitians of Canada (11) <https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/probiotics.html> (12) https://www.todaysdietitian.com/news/012916_news.shtml