

BOOST YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM

Introduction



Protect yourself against virus invaders. The best way to minimize your chances of getting an infection - and recovering rapidly if you do - is to boost your immune function.

The immune system is a complex, interconnected network which orchestrates a range of responses to bacterial infection, virus attacks, disease and toxins.

A poor diet can compromise the immune system by depleting the body of essential nutrients that play an important role in maintaining this finely balanced system. Conventional medicine like antibiotics, steroids and anti-inflammatory drugs suppress the immune response; as does stress, lack of sleep and low or no exercise.

Allergies are an immune system response to certain stimuli and can also be caused by food intolerances - often a sign that the digestive process is out of balance and needs help.

Food, diet and vitamin intake



A balanced healthy diet needs to consist of fresh fruit and vegetables, especially the colourful ones - including red and yellow peppers, dark greens - cabbage, broccoli, watercress; sweet potatoes and berries. The majority of your diet should be pulses, vegetables and fruit. A high intake of acidic food like red meat, dairy products, sugar and salt suppress the immune system.

These foods can stimulate excessive mucous production which often creates congestion and allows the growth of bacteria and viruses.

The healthy fats found in nuts, seeds and oily fish support membranes. Omega 3 fatty acids found in fish oils have anti-inflammatory and immune enhancing actions.

We need a range of vitamins from our foods. Vitamin A is required for healthy vision and tissue growth and regulates the immune system. Vitamin B is essential for red blood cell formation, cell metabolism and nerve function. Vitamin C (ascorbic acid) is an anti-oxidant and helps the body absorb iron. It is water soluble and so if taking a supplement try to split the dose and take twice a day. Vitamin C acts as an anti-histamine. Vitamin E (tocopherol) is also anti-oxidant; protects red blood cells and plays a role in immune function; plus helps DNA repair some metabolic functions.

The Star of the Vitamin World - Vitamin D needs a page of its own

Many health experts believe Government recommendations for the required dose



is too low. Vitamin D not only helps the body absorb Calcium but research reveals it also plays a part in reducing the risk of getting some major illnesses including some cancers, autoimmune disease and cardiovascular disease. It is fat soluble and really a hormone, produced by the body from sunlight exposure on our skin. The body can store amounts of Vitamin D and so caution is needed if taking supplements. Vitamin D is found in few foods the main source is oily fish and eggs; and so a supplement is usually needed especially if you are a

Vegan. Most people are Vitamin D deficient - when you can see your GP ask for a blood test to check levels.

What else can we do?

Other helpful nutrients include Selenium, Iron, Calcium, Zinc and Magnesium. Zinc can help balance immune function which has become over-reactive as in allergy response.

I often use steam inhalations - using one or two drops of essential oils of either Rosemary, Pine, Eucalyptus, Tea tree or Thyme which can help clear congested airways and fight infection. (Please note: essential oils are not for internal consumption; and must only be used sparingly in hot water for inhalations or blended with carrier oils when applied to the skin).

We need some mucous to form for the first line of defence against airborne infections. Mucous contains leukocytes, which are the primary cells that fight against infection and tissue damage.

Garlic and Ginger are helpful in the fight against colds and flu. Garlic contains sulphur compounds which have powerful anti-viral and anti-bacterial agents. Ginger is particularly good for sore throats, nausea and stomach upsets. Ginger, cinnamon and lemon with Manuka honey in hot water makes a soothing drink to help loosen mucous.

Gastro-intestinal tract (GIT)

A well functioning digestive system relies on healthy gut flora (gut biome) and the absorption of nutrients in turn supports the immune function. A large proportion of the immune system is found in the GI tract. Anything that damages the integrity of the GIT such as prolonged use of non steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAID), Aspirin Ibuprofen, antibiotics, steroids; alcohol and coffee are detrimental. Eating probiotic foods or taking a Probiotic supplement is very helpful to restore gut flora.

Research has revealed sugar can significantly reduce the number of white blood cells which are needed to destroy invading micro-organisms. Cigarettes, habitual alcohol, tea and coffee drinking put a strain on immune function and can also promote demineralising - leaching calcium from the bones.



Regular exercise has been shown to benefit our health generally and the immune system by increasing the number of white blood cells in the body.



Sleep and Stress



A regular sleep pattern improves resistance to infection, and so it is important to get seven to eight hours each night. Lack of sleep depletes nutrients especially Magnesium and Vitamin C.

Stress is a key suppressor of immune function; it depletes the B Vitamins, Vitamin C and Magnesium. Therefore rest and relaxation are also important to ensure the immune response is strong and does not get overwhelmed. At times of prolonged stress, after illness or periods of pressure at work (ongoing for many) poor dietary habits and lack of sleep, there are ways to support your immune system.

I use research based strategies to boost immune function through diet, supplements, lifestyle and herbs tinctures, teas or tablets.

This is always dependent on a patient's detailed medical history. The Kent and Sussex Tea & Coffee Co has a good selection of herbal teas (as well as black teas and coffee beans for those occasional cups) www.tea-and-coffee.com/buy-tea/health-benefits

Please note: This advice is not meant to be a substitute for medical advice. If you feel unwell please contact your GP; do not self diagnose; take advice from a qualified Herbalist or Nutritionist.

