

WORK, MONEY, AND HEALTH
ADVICE FOR BUSY PEOPLE

balance



Eat for Powerful Immunity

COLD AND FLU SEASON IS ALMOST UPON US—AND WE’RE ALL ANXIOUSLY WATCHING FOR A SPIKE OF COVID-19. IF YOU’RE FEELING EXTRA MOTIVATED TO BOOST YOUR IMMUNITY TO THE MAX (AND KEEP IT THERE UNTIL SPRING), START BY OPTIMIZING YOUR DIET.

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PROP STYLING BY ASTRID CHASTKA FOR HELLO ARTISTS

WE RELY ON OUR immune system every day to protect us from germs, but a pandemic brings its importance into sharp focus. If you want to feel confident that yours is in top-notch working order, start with one big question: How's your diet?

"Most of our immune system is concentrated in the gut," says Michael Greger, MD, founder of NutritionFacts.org and author of *How to Survive a Pandemic*. In fact, it's thought that about 70 percent of your immune response originates from this digestive command center. The lining of your intestines covers more than 2,000 square feet (!) and is home to friendly bacteria and white blood cells, including those that produce antibodies. Not surprisingly, then, your diet plays a crucial role in your body's ability to fight viruses and other germs. New studies point to the following nutrients and dietary habits that either undermine the immune system or keep it going strong.



IMMUNITY SABOTEURS

IMMUNITY ENEMY #1

Excess Alcohol

Relaxing with a glass of wine every other day or so is OK. But if you've started drinking more than that to cope with stress, "it will be harder to fight further complications if you develop Covid-19," says Kristin Kirkpatrick, RDN, a dietitian at Cleveland Clinic. In April, a European branch of the World Health Organization advised people to limit alcohol consumption, particularly during the current pandemic, noting that alcohol compromises immunity and carries other health risks. Plus, alcohol harms the liver, which helps fight infections.

INSTEAD: Kirkpatrick says that people who like to drink two or three glasses of wine a day can still do so...provided they dilute the wine with sparkling water. "Measure out five ounces of wine—the equivalent of one glass—and put it in three separate glasses," she advises. "Then add seltzer to fill the glasses." Take other small steps: Cut back to drinking every other day rather than daily, or indulge only on weekends. "Give your liver a break!" Kirkpatrick says.

IMMUNITY ENEMY #2**Added Sugars**

Diets high in sugar and refined carbs contribute to chronic conditions like obesity, diabetes, and heart disease—all of which have been linked to more serious symptoms of Covid-19. “Having a sweet here and there isn’t going to affect our immune system,” says Vincent C. Tubiolo, MD, an allergy, asthma, and immunology specialist in Santa Barbara, California. “But substituting more nutritious things with sweets creates health problems, and then the risk of infection goes up.”

Americans consume about 17 teaspoons of sugar a *day*, when the recommended daily limit is six teaspoons for women and nine for men. These high levels of added sugar can lead to chronic inflammation, which experts believe puts the immune system on overdrive against itself.

INSTEAD: Whenever you want a sweet fix, choose something that contains fiber, which slows the absorption of sugar into the bloodstream and helps mitigate the rapid rise and fall in blood sugar and insulin that can damage organs, nerves, and blood vessels. “That’s why whole fruit is so good for you,” Kirkpatrick says. Other high-fiber picks: chocolate-covered almonds or a whole-grain muffin. And if you’re a baker, experiment with a fiber-rich flour, like almond or coconut, and try making pizza crust with cauliflower rather than white flour.

IMMUNITY ENEMY #3**Too Much Sodium**

Most Americans consume a lot of salt, especially from packaged, processed, and fast foods. A recent German study found that people who were given an additional six grams of salt per day—similar to the amount in two large fast-food meals—showed weakened immunity after just one week. Excess salt is also a risk factor for high blood pressure and heart disease.

INSTEAD: Cooking meals at home with fresh ingredients is the best way to reduce sodium. Shop for low-sodium versions of obvious culprits, such as beans, soups, and cheese (especially Halloumi, feta, and blue). “Reading labels is crucial, since there are many surprising high-sodium foods, including sliced bread—even whole-wheat—plus hot dog and hamburger buns, tortillas, flatbreads, store-bought pizza crusts...basically anything bready,” says Jenna Helwig, *Real Simple*’s food director.

IMMUNITY BOOSTERS**IMMUNITY ALLY #1****A Refreshing Glass of Kombucha**

Experts believe that keeping the trillions of bacteria in the gut (called the microbiome) healthy is key to immunity. If you don’t, “pathogenic bacteria may take over, resulting in inflammation and compromising immune function,” says Christopher D. Gardner, PhD, Rehnborg Farquhar Professor of Medicine at Stanford University’s Prevention Research Center.

EAT UP! An easy approach to a happy gut: Enjoy one to two daily servings of prebiotic or probiotic foods. Prebiotics (found in foods like beans, chickpeas, and lentils) are dietary fibers that feed the good bacteria; probiotic foods (such as kombucha, yogurt, sauerkraut, kimchi, and kefir) are fermented and contain live bacteria. “Probiotics may actually improve immune function throughout the body,” Gardner says. Choose items with low added sugar, like Health-Ade Ginger-Lemon Kombucha, KeVita Cucumber Rosemary Sparkling Probiotic Drink, and Siggis, Fage, and Chobani yogurts.

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IMMUNITY ALLY #2

A Crunchy, Colorful Salad

Consider a bowl of rainbow-colored plants your ticket to immunity-boosting nirvana. It's a satisfying source of a trio of protective antioxidants—vitamins A, C, and E.

EAT UP! Start with a base of kale or arugula. A chemical in these vegetables, called sulforaphane, may help reverse some of the immune decline that comes with

age. Then pile on peppers for vitamin C, an “immune superstar” that helps produce infection-fighting antibodies, Kirkpatrick says. Toss in carrots for vitamin A and nuts and seeds for vitamin E (which Americans tend to fall short on). Add other cruciferous vegetables—broccoli, purple cabbage, cauliflower—for even more sulforaphane.



IMMUNITY ALLY #3

Blueberry-Cardamom Compote

When it comes to immunity benefits, blueberries stand out. They're high in flavonoids—powerful anti-inflammatory antioxidants that help protect against upper-respiratory infections. “Studies have shown that blueberries boost levels of natural killer cells,” Greger says. These white blood cells are a kind of rapid-response team against cancer cells and viruses, including novel ones like the coronavirus. “They're called ‘natural killer cells’ because they don't require prior exposure to a threat to be activated,” Greger explains.

And while eating blueberries may boost the *number* of natural killer cells, there's one spice—cardamom—that might boost their *activity*. In a petri dish, natural killer cells could eliminate more cancer cells after cardamom was added, Greger notes.

EAT UP! This fruit sauce, from the *Real Simple* food team, is an easy, delicious way to get your fill of blueberries and cardamom.

Mix a 12-ounce bag of frozen blueberries (about 3 cups), 2 tablespoons maple syrup, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon vanilla extract, $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon ground cardamom, and $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon kosher salt in a medium saucepan. Cook over medium-high, stirring occasionally, until fruit thaws and breaks down, 5 to 10 minutes. Whisk in 2 teaspoons cornstarch and boil, whisking, until sauce is glossy and thickened, about 1 minute. Serve over plain Greek yogurt, oatmeal, pancakes, waffles, or ice cream. Refrigerate in an airtight container for up to 5 days.