

Nutrition and Immunity

Nutrition can help support your immune system, but it can't "boost" it

An immune-supporting diet doesn't look that different than a basic healthful diet

Other lifestyle factors also play an important role in immunity.

Nutrients that support your immune system:

VITAMIN C Helps build healthy skin; protect cells from damage due to its role as an antioxidant.
Sources: Citrus fruits (oranges, grapefruits, tangerines), strawberries, papaya, bell peppers and Brussels sprouts

VITAMIN A Keeps the skin, tissues in stomach and intestines, and the respiratory system healthy; helps regulate the immune system.
Sources: Colorful foods like carrots, sweet potatoes, broccoli, spinach, pumpkin, squash and cantaloupe

FOLIC ACID Produces antibodies and synthesizes immune cell DNA and protein.
Sources: leafy greens, many fruits (especially oranges), beans, peas, nuts and fortified grain products

PROBIOTICS AND PREBIOTICS Help maintain a healthy gut microbiome, which is a major site of immune activity.
Sources: Probiotic foods include kefir, yogurt with live active cultures, fermented vegetables, sauerkraut, tempeh, kombucha tea, kimchi and miso.
Prebiotics are obtained by eating a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and beans.

VITAMIN E Protects immune cells from damage due to its role as an antioxidant.
Sources: Almonds, sunflower seeds, peanut butter, vegetable oil, spinach and broccoli

VITAMIN D Helps with properly regulating immune cell function.
Sources: Fortified foods (milk, cereal, orange juice), fatty fish (salmon, mackerel, tuna) and sunshine

IRON Promotes the growth and activity of immune cells, and carries oxygen to them.
Sources: lean meats, seafood, eggs, beans, nuts and fortified breakfast cereals

ZINC Supports creation of new immune cells, which contributes to the body's ability to heal from wounds.
Sources: Lean meats, chicken, turkey, crab, oysters, milk, whole grains and seeds

PROTEIN Helps build antibodies and immune system cells; plays an important role in healing and recovery.
Sources: Eggs, milk, yogurt, fish, lean meats, chicken, turkey, beans, soy products and nuts and seeds

Deficiencies in these vitamins and minerals may compromise immune function. If your diet is limited in variety and nutrient-density, consider a multivitamin that provides the recommended amounts of these nutrients.

Prioritize sleep

Sleep is a time of restoration for the body, during which a type of cytokine is released that fights infection; too little sleep lowers the amount of these cytokines and other immune cells.

Manage stress

Stress releases hormones like cortisol that suppress inflammation (inflammation is initially needed to activate immune cells) and the action of white blood cells.

Stay active

Physical activity can help increase the circulation of immune cells, enhancing their activity, and potentially reducing inflammation throughout the body (chronic inflammation lowers immune function).

