



MenuMentors Top Tips for a Healthy Immune System

General diet and lifestyle	
Low GI diet	Keep your blood sugar stable with low GI meals and snacks (if required) (see blood sugar handout and food planner).
Reduce the 'nasties'	<p>Sugar - can impair white blood cell activity leading to depressed immunity and promotes bacteria imbalance in the gut.</p> <p>Alcohol - Too much alcohol deprives the body of valuable immune-boosting nutrients such as vitamin A required for healthy white blood cells- your body's defence against illness and disease.</p> <p>Smoking – Compromises absorption of vitamin C and iron. Makes you more susceptible to infections of the lung and effects cardiovascular and gut health.</p>
Adequate protein	Infection increases our need for protein, so you should increase your intake: Pulses, wholegrains, nuts and seeds, seafood especially oily fish, game, lean chicken. Limit red meat to twice a week.
Fruit and Veg	Increase fresh fruit and vegetables to boost your overall micronutrient intake especially vitamin C.
Digestion and appetite	<p>A healthy gut is the key to a healthy immune system. Your digestive function might not be working at its best, if you are run down try not to overstress it with heavy, fatty or high meat meals. If you are really struggling to digest, try things which are easier on the digestion like nourishing soups or smoothies with added protein e.g. from nut butters. Include plenty of fibre found in whole grains and fruit and vegetables which can help the gut to excrete harmful toxins.</p> <p>Include sources of prebiotics in your diet, as these feed good bacteria. In addition, taking a probiotic can be helpful. This helps to encourage the growth of friendly bacteria which help protect against harmful gut microbes which lead to infection.</p> <p>If your appetite is low it could be a sign of low zinc status (especially if it is accompanied by loss of taste or smell). Boost zinc foods (see next page) and also try to stimulate the appetite with bitter foods e.g. radicchio, endive, chicory and boost your natural enzymes generally by eating some fruit and veg raw especially papaya or pineapple.</p> <p>Sometimes low immunity means our body struggles to produce enough stomach acid, so lemon juice or vinegar in dressings at the beginning of the meal can also aid digestion.</p>
Elimination	Infections can produce a lot of toxins so it's important to help the body eliminate them. Stay very well hydrated by drinking plenty of water. Support your liver with an array of brightly coloured fruit and veg. The liver is one of the most hardworking and multitasking organs in the body. Part of the digestive system, it makes digestive fluids, makes and breaks down hormones, helps regulate blood sugar and processes all food, nutrients, alcohol, drugs and toxins that enter the blood stream. Sweating is also a good way to remove toxins.
Obesity	Obesity is associated with impaired immune response. Diets high in sugar and fat, or eating too many calories in general, make you more prone to infection. This is because it can lead to increases in blood sugar or may cause oxidative damage. Oxidative damage is an overproduction of reactive oxygen species compared to the body's ability to detoxify cells. This type of damage from oxygen increases your chances of infection.
Stress and poor sleep	Our state of mind impacts our immune function. Continual stress (which can be psychological, over exercising, poor sleep, etc.) all raise our stress hormone cortisol which suppresses our immune system. So try to do more things that help you relax e.g. massage, Epsom salt bath, country walks and make sure you get plenty of sleep.
Exercise	Vigorous exercise should be avoided if you feel like you are sickening for something or if you are actually ill. But if you are recovering then relaxing exercise such as gentle yoga, Tai chi, walking, gardening etc., can all be beneficial. Once you are free of any infection and your energy levels are on the mend regular more vigorous exercise will help boost immunity.

Specific nutrients for immunity	
Garlic	Natural antifungal and antiviral. Most effective when raw.
Coconut products	Natural anti fungal, antiviral, antibacterial. Go organic to avoid nasty preservatives in some of these products (e.g. Biona).
Live (probiotic) products	Our gut bacteria help keep our immune system healthy. Boost them by eating products with live bacteria (live probiotic yoghurts, unsweetened probiotic drinks, kefir, sauerkraut) and giving them the food they like i.e. insoluble fibre found in fruit and veg, wholegrains, pulses, nuts and seeds.
Beta glucans	Beta-glucans help prime our immune system into action. Wholegrains have moderate amounts and mushrooms have a very high content (as well as lots of other great nutrients), so can help support immune function.
Vitamin A and the beta-carotenes	All animal products. Red, orange, yellow and green vegetables e.g. carrots, peppers, cabbage, greens. Beta carotenes are better absorbed when they are accompanied by a little oil e.g. an olive oil dressing.
Vitamin C	Fruit and veg (Vit C is higher when they are fresh and raw).
Flavanoids	A wide variety of fresh fruit and veg, also dark chocolate, green tea, herbs and spices.
Vitamin E	Nuts, seeds, avocado, quality oils (avocado, nut oils, olive oil).
B Vitamins	Yeast, whole grains, green leafy vegetables, nuts, seeds, beans, offal, meat, fish and eggs
Iron	Black strap molasses, leafy green veg, liver, all meat products.
Zinc	Seafood, nuts and seeds (especially pumpkin), red meat.
Selenium	Brewer's yeast, yeast flakes (e.g. Engevita), brazil nuts.