

It's Cold and Flu Season - Bolster Your Defenses!

A strong immune system is the body's best defense against colds and flu. Good nutrition is key to building your body's defenses. Help fight common bugs by filling your diet with healthy foods.

Load up on fruits and vegetables. They contain powerful antioxidants, vitamins and minerals which will build up your immune system to help fight off illness. Choose brightly colored or dark green fruits and veggies for the most antioxidants. Aim for 7 to 8 servings per day. One serving equals one small to medium sized piece of fruit or vegetable or half a cup of chopped.

Digestive health plays an important role in preventing sickness. Normally, your body contains "friendly" bacteria, or flora, that help fight off any "bad" bacteria trying to gain access to your system. Diets high in refined sugar, frequent antibiotic use, and everyday stress can disrupt this healthy balance of "friendly" versus "bad" bacteria, leaving one more vulnerable to sickness.

You can help restore healthy digestive flora by eating foods that naturally contain good bacteria and/or by taking a probiotic supplement. Probiotics can be found naturally in fermented foods such as yogurt, buttermilk, miso, tempeh, and fresh sauerkraut.

Vitamin D is also thought to play an important role in strengthening the immune system. Health Canada recommends 200-600 IU per day depending on age. Some other national health organizations recommend higher doses. For instance the Canadian Cancer Society recommends 1000 IU per day for adults during the fall and winter months. Dietary sources of vitamin D include milk, fortified soy beverage, salmon, tuna, sardines and egg yolks. Talk to your health care provider to learn if you are getting enough Vitamin D.

Of course nutrition is only part of the solution. Exercise is also a powerful way to bolster your immune system. Among the many benefits of exercise is stress reduction. Stress takes a significant toll on our immune system so it's important to take time for yourself. Get out for a brisk walk, bike ride, take part in yoga, or any physical activity that you enjoy!

Author: Simone Jennings is a Community Nutritionist with Interior Health

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