



## 12 Foods to Boost Your Immune System

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A strong immune system is always important but even more critical given the prevalence of the coronavirus. As we slowly return to being with groups of people, our immune system will have to work harder to keep us well. We know that quality sleep, regular exercise, proper hand washing, and social distancing contribute to a healthy immune system but the foods we eat are also important to good health.

A wide variety of foods containing important vitamins and minerals such as vitamins A, C and D, as well as zinc, antioxidants, and omega-3-fatty acids can help strengthen your immune system. Here are some suggestions:

- **Beans**, including black beans, kidney beans, garbanzo beans, lentils and others are excellent sources of fiber, plant protein, B-vitamins, iron, magnesium, and zinc. In particular, zinc may help shorten the duration of a cold.
- **Berries**, blueberries, strawberries, and raspberries contain vitamin C and flavonoids and other antioxidants that can lower the incidence of upper respiratory infections.
- **Broccoli** is a nutrient dense cruciferous vegetable rich in vitamins A, C and E. Raw broccoli has a higher vitamin C content but cooking broccoli slightly releases more vitamin A, either way, eat it often!
- **Eggs** are a nutritious, immune system boosting food to add to your diet. The egg yolk contains most of the nutrients such as vitamins A and D; iron, zinc and selenium. Health experts are not as concerned with the cholesterol content in egg yolk. Plus, on an ounce by ounce basis, eggs are the least expensive protein you can buy!
- **Fatty fishes** such as salmon, mackerel, and herring are outstanding sources of omega-3 fatty acids, DHA and EPA, which can help with the activation of certain immune cells and decrease inflammation. Also, omega-3 fatty acids contain vitamin D and zinc, more disease fighting nutrients.

- **Leafy greens** such as kale, spinach, collard greens, and swiss chard are great sources of vitamins A and C. Vitamin A plays an important role toward improving immune function, regulating the immune response and decreasing inflammation. Leafy greens also contain several antioxidants and flavonoids. It has been shown that flavonoids may help reduce the incidence of upper respiratory infections.
- **Nuts and Seeds** are great sources of vitamin E, an important antioxidant that can support immune function. They are also high in zinc and other important nutrients like iron, copper, and magnesium. Sprinkle them in yogurt, cereal, and enjoy as a snack!
- **Lean meats and poultry** are good sources of zinc and B-vitamins, which help with energy production and aid the immune system. They are also high in protein, an important building block to repair body tissue and fight inflammation.
- **Raw cheese**, raw milk unpasteurized cheese such as goat or farmers cheese that contain bacteria and survive the journey through the gut can benefit your health. These also include gouda, mozzarella, cheddar, swiss and parmesan.
- **Oats** can be a strong immunity booster. One cup of rolled oats contains many antioxidants, polyphenols, and 3 mg of zinc, this is 25% of your daily need for zinc! Also, oats contain beta-glucan, a soluble fiber, that helps lower the bad cholesterol and strengthens the immune system. The fiber content in rolled oats is higher than quick or instant varieties.
- **Greek Yogurt** is an excellent source of protein but also an important source of probiotics, a type of bacteria that can keep your gut healthy. This good type of bacteria cultivates a healthy immune response. The gut contains 70-80% of our immune cells! Look for Greek yogurt, Kefir (drinkable yogurt) or other types with “live and active cultures” that contain a variety of probiotic strains and several billion CFU’s (colony forming units).
- **Kombucha**, a fermented black or green tea, often flavored with herbs and fruit, is another probiotic that feeds the gut with healthy bacteria promoting a strong immune response. It may contain a small amount of alcohol produced during fermentation. Choose an unpasteurized brand to insure the presence of “live and active” cultures.

This is not an exhaustive list but highlights how important food can be to keep us disease free. Generally speaking, the more diverse the intake from fruits, vegetables, lean protein sources, nuts, seeds, legumes, dairy, and whole grains the stronger our bodies will be to protect us.

