

DIET TO DEFEND

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During this unprecedented time it is safe to say most people are spending more time inside, but likely outside their comfort zone. While your focus is on preparing for caring for those at work and at home, don't forget to support your own health and immune system during this time as well.

Research has shown a healthy lifestyle isn't a guarantee you won't still become ill, it can be your first line of defense and is something you can control.

Some lifestyle strategies for a healthy immune system include

- adequate sleep
- regular exercise
- frequent hand washing
- moderation of alcohol
- don't smoke
- manage/minimize stress
- maintain a healthy weight
- eat a balanced diet

While eating a variety of foods helps support your overall health, there are foods that have been shown to support your body's immune system more effectively. There is more work that needs to be done in this area of health, but here is what research has shown so far:

Limit sugar intake

Spikes in blood sugar after having sweet treats or a couple of sodas have been found to suppress your immune system for at least a few hours. White blood cells have also been found to not be as aggressive against bacteria when observed under a microscope. So, if you indulge a few times a day, your defense system is likely "short-staffed" for much of your day. Unfortunately when stressed, many people tend to crave these sugary foods. Try to go for a walk, read something other than the headlines, call a friend or find a new hobby. Remember, food can only fix hunger.

Yogurt

Yogurt - the active cultures (probiotics) in yogurt have been shown to enhance your immune system and they promote a healthy gut environment to support your overall health. Look for brands with less "added sugar" or get the plain, low fat yogurt and add a little vanilla, honey or cinnamon for flavor.

Load up on these vitamins & minerals

There are many vitamins and minerals that support your immune system, but the following are some of the most effective along with a list of foods they are found in. Keep in mind that your body will use the vitamins and minerals from food much better than what you receive in most supplements:

Vitamin C – citrus fruits like oranges and tangerines, berries, kiwi, green/red/yellow peppers, tomatoes, cantaloupe, papaya

Vitamin A – think dark green or orange colored fruits and vegetables like carrots, sweet potatoes, winter squash, broccoli, spinach, Brussel sprouts

Vitamin D – milk, salmon, canned tuna, mushrooms, egg yolks

Vitamin E – sunflower seeds, vegetable oils, wheat germ and nuts

Zinc – meat, fish, eggs, beans, garlic, whole grains and nuts

