

H1: 7 Ways to Boost Your Immune System Naturally

Meta description: It pays to be proactive. These seven healthy dietary and lifestyle habits boost your immune system – so you're less likely to fall ill in the first place.

Getting sick is the pits. Body aches, fatigue, runny nose, fever, and sore throat are *never* fun. Not to mention the stress of getting behind at work *and* the bummer of missing out on fun social events.

Right now, a lot of life feels out of our control. However, you're not entirely powerless. If Covid's taught us anything, it's the importance of taking care of ourselves.

There's plenty of healthy dietary and lifestyle habits you can implement to boost your immune system. That way, you'll be less likely to pick up every little bug that's floating around.

Here are seven ways to boost your immune system naturally:

H2: Eating for Immunity = Eating More Plants

If you want to supercharge your immune system, you'll want to make friends with eating plants. Why? Plant foods such as fruits, vegetables, seeds, nuts, and legumes are rich in antioxidants, combating harmful free radicals that cause inflammation. (1)

Plant foods are also bursting with fiber, which serves as food for the good-guy bacteria in your gut. (2) Did you know 70% of your immune system lives in your gut? (3) Keeping your internal army well-fed will ensure they have the gusto to keep bad bacteria in check.

Plus, fruits and veggies are packed with immune-boosting vitamins and minerals such as:

H3: Vitamin C

Research shows this powerful antioxidant can reduce the duration and severity of colds and even prevent them! (4, 5) Foods rich in vitamin C include:

- Bell peppers
- Strawberries
- Oranges
- Broccoli
- Tomato
- Kale

H3: Vitamin E

Vitamin E, another potent antioxidant, increases your immune system's T-cells that help fight off infections. (6) Solid sources of vitamin E include:

- Sunflower seeds
- Almonds
- Avocados
- Spinach
- Butternut squash
- Kiwi
- Broccoli

H3: Vitamin A

Vitamin A is another critical antioxidant that enhances T-cell production and supports healthy mucous membranes. (7) Foods high in vitamin A include:

- Carrots
- Tuna
- Sweet potato
- Cantaloupe
- Lettuce
- Grapefruit
- Broccoli (yes...again!)

H3: Zinc

Zinc, an important mineral with antiviral properties, has been shown to support a healthy immune response against viral respiratory infections. (8) Zinc is found in many animal foods and some plants foods, including:

- Shellfish
- Beef
- Chicken
- Hemp seeds
- Lentils
- Yogurt
- Oatmeal

H2: Add Some Spice to Your Life

Adding spices to your meals not only makes them tastier – it gives your immune system a boost too! Win-win. Try adding more of these immune-boosting herbs and into your meals:

H3: Garlic

Garlic is a powerhouse of immunity. Its sulfur-containing compounds reduce inflammation and increase your body's natural defenses. Studies show garlic can reduce the severity and duration of colds and flu and *even* reduce the likelihood they happen in the first place! (9, 10)

H3: Ginger

This spicy root contains gingerol, a compound that boasts antioxidant and anti-inflammatory effects. Used for years as a traditional remedy for nausea, stomach aches, and muscle cramps, it also shows promising antimicrobial and antiviral effects. (11, 12)

H3: Turmeric

Turmeric, the bright yellow spice that gives curry its vibrant hue, has potent antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties.

It contains the compound curcumin, whose immune-boosting powers have been shown to prevent viral replication. (13) When cooking with turmeric, be sure to add a pinch of pepper, as this increases curcumin absorption by up to 2,000%! (14)

H2: Get a Good Night's Sleep

While you're sleeping, your body is hard at work. During sleep, your body produces cytokines, proteins that help immune cells fight off infections. Don't get enough shut-eye, and your cytokine production drops, making infections more likely.

Lack of sleep also raises the stress hormone cortisol. Chronic high cortisol levels prevent your body from launching attacks against invaders.

But that's not all – your body also produces immune-boosting T-cells while you're snoozing. (15) T-cells help fight off harmful pathogens like the viruses that cause colds and flu. Research shows that adults who get less than 6 hours of sleep are more likely to catch colds. (16)

How much sleep is enough? The CDC recommends adults get *at least* 7 hours of sleep every night. (17) Although if you're recovering from a bug or can feel one coming on, you'll likely need more.

Have trouble sleeping? Check out these eight helpful tips on how to get better sleep.

H2: Exercise Regularly (Preferably Outside)

Physical activity not only reduces your risk of diabetes, heart disease, and obesity – it also strengthens your immune system. (18) How? Well, for starters, exercise increases your body's blood and lymph flow, enhancing the circulation of immune cells.

Exercise also boosts endorphins, those feel-good hormones that act as natural painkillers. Stress is a monster for immunity. Physical activity serves as a helpful stress-busting tool to keep your immune system strong.

Want to amplify your workouts' immune-boosting effects? Take them outside! The sunshine will give you a free dose of vitamin D, an essential nutrient for immunity. People with low levels of vitamin D are more prone to infection and autoimmunity. (19)

H2: Keep Your Stress in Check

As said earlier, stress is a killer for your immune system. Chronic stress keeps you in a state of inflammation, linked with illnesses like heart disease, diabetes, liver disease, autoimmunity, and even cancer! (20)

Long-term stress also elevates your body's cortisol, keeping you in a constant state of "fight or flight." This emergency mode prevents your body from attacking invaders until the stressful event is over.

What's the key to getting *out* of emergency mode? Commit to regular stress relief. This will let your body know it's safe to exit the cortisol roller coaster ride.

Here are some stress-busting activities you may want to add to the mix:

- Practice yoga
- Meditate (try apps like [Headspace](#) and [Calm](#) to guide you)
- Journal
- Spend time in nature
- Read a book
- Play with your kids or a pet
- Get creative! Paint, draw, dance, play an instrument or get crafty
- Or any other fun activity you enjoy...

H2: Eat Fermented Foods and Take Probiotics

As I said earlier, 70% of your immune system lives in your gut! (21) So, if you want robust immunity, you've got to give your gut some love. And the key to good gut health is a diverse microbiome.

Your microbiome is the unique collection of bacteria, fungi, and viruses that live in and on your body. Most of them live in your digestive tract. While some of these microbes are beneficial, others are harmful. The secret is making sure the good guys outnumber the bad.

Here are two simple ways to get your gut thriving:

H3: Eat Fermented Foods

Fermented foods have gone through fermentation – a process where bacteria and yeast break down sugars. Fermentation boosts the enzyme and nutritional value of foods while flooding your gut with beneficial bacteria.

Having a few servings of fermented foods each day is a simple way to enhance your microbiome diversity. Here are a few to try:

- Yogurt (opt for unsweetened or low-sugar varieties)
- Kefir
- Sauerkraut
- Miso
- Natto
- Tempeh
- Kimchi
- Kombucha
- Pickled vegetables

H3: Take a Probiotic Daily

If you're not big on fermented foods or want a more on-the-go way to give your gut some love, try taking a daily probiotic. Probiotics are *teeming* with live beneficial bacteria. Taking them regularly can ensure that your internal army has the troops to mount a defense – no matter what's thrown your way.

Suffer from chronic digestive issues? Or did a course of antibiotics wreck your gut? Probiotics can help tip the balance of your gut – so you have more helpful bacteria than harmful. (22)

H2: Keep Immune-Boosting Supplements Handy

In an ideal world, you'd get all your vitamins and minerals from food alone. But that's not always possible – *even* if you eat a clean diet brimming with organic fruits and veggies. Modern farming practices have degraded our soil, causing the nutrients in our food supply to decline.

That's why it's helpful to have some supplements on hand to fill in the gaps. Here are a few immune boosters you'll want to add to your arsenal:

- **Vitamin C** is a potent antioxidant known to reduce the severity and duration of colds. (4, 5) However, don't go overboard, as high doses can cause loose stools. Aim for 500-2,000 mg per day.
- **Vitamin D** deficiency is linked with an increased risk of infections. (19) While you can get vitamin D via the sun, nearly 42% of Americans don't get enough. (23) The recommended daily intake for Vitamin D is 400-800 IUs. However, if you struggle to get sun exposure, you may need more.

- **Zinc** is a mineral crucial for immunity. Like vitamin C, it can shorten the duration and severity of colds. (24) Studies show its antiviral properties are beneficial in treating respiratory illnesses like the flu. (8) The recommended daily zinc intake is 8 mg for women and 11 mg for men. However, you can take up to 40 mg safely if you're battling a bug.
- **Elderberry** is a potent antiviral shown to reduce the duration of flu symptoms by 3-4 days. (25) It's available in syrup, tincture, and even gummies! It's most effective when taken at the onset of symptoms.

Be proactive and put together your immunity kit *now*. That way, the moment you feel that elusive tickle in your throat – you'll have the tools you need to nip it in the bud.

Takeaways

Time for a refresh! Here are the seven immune-boosting tips we've covered:

1. Chow down on more plants. Especially ones rich in vitamin C, vitamin E, Vitamin A, & zinc.
2. Spice it up! Add garlic, ginger, and turmeric to your dishes whenever you can.
3. Get at least 7 hours of quality sleep every night.
4. Get physical! Exercise often (and take it outside when possible).
5. Inject stress relief into your day.
6. Add in fermented foods and take a daily probiotic.
7. Supplement wisely. Put together your immunity kit now – before you get sick.

Yes, germs are everywhere. And while you can't live in a bubble, you *can* create healthy habits to boost your immune system. The more committed you are to the practices we've covered, the better able you'll be to fight off disease when it strikes.

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