

Immune Health 101: How to Protect Your Family This Season

As winter arrives and temperatures drop, everyone's risk of cold, flu, and other viruses increases significantly as we spend more time indoors. There is no better time to focus on wellness and immune health. Although there is no guaranteed way to prevent illnesses, lifestyle and nutrition strategies can help optimize immune function. Here's what science tells us about the best ways to stay healthy this time of year.

Lifestyle Foundations for Immune Health

Your immune system works around the clock to keep you healthy. It's a complex system of white blood cells, antibodies, and other defense cells that work with tissues, membranes, and pathogen-killing substances.

A healthy immune system constantly watches for bacteria, viruses, and other invaders and stops them before they cause serious harm. It also plays a crucial role in preventing chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, or cancer by protecting healthy cells and promoting a healthy response to inflammation.

A healthy diet and lifestyle provide a strong foundation and the tools your immune system needs to function well.

Optimize nutrition

A balanced diet provides essential nutrients to build and maintain immune cells and tissues and to help them function properly. Plant foods, in particular, have naturally occurring compounds that protect cells from oxidative damage, reduce inflammation, and support the gut microbiome, which plays a vital role in immune health.¹

Emphasize whole foods and include a variety of these each day:¹

- Colorful fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables. These provide antioxidants, vitamins, and prebiotic fiber to support beneficial gut bacteria. Add more leafy green and orange vegetables for beta carotene, as well as citrus fruits, sweet peppers, and strawberries for vitamin C.
- Lean proteins, such as fish, poultry, eggs, or tofu, help build antibodies. Oily fish and egg yolks also provide vitamin D, a key nutrient that supports immune health.

- Healthy fats such as olive oil, nuts, and seeds have anti-inflammatory benefits. A healthy response to inflammation is critical for immune function and healing.
- Fermented foods such as yogurt, kefir, kimchi, and sauerkraut support gut health. Your gut microbiome plays a crucial role in immune health, so add more beneficial bacteria from these foods whenever possible.

Limit highly processed, packaged food with long lists of artificial ingredients, as well as fast food. These often contain unhealthy fats, sugar, refined carbohydrates, and high amounts of salt. Eating these frequently can impair immune function and decrease your resistance to infections.¹

Get regular exercise

Moderate daily physical activity increases the circulation of immune cells throughout your body. Moderate-intensity exercise lowers inflammation, balances stress hormones, promotes better sleep quality and contributes to a healthy weight.² All of these actions enhance immune system function.

Evidence shows that having a physically active lifestyle reduces the risk of contracting contagious diseases, such as colds and flu. Studies have also found that regular, moderate-intensity exercise reduces upper respiratory tract infection symptoms by 40-50%.^{1,2}

Adults should aim for at least 30 minutes of aerobic activity, such as swimming or brisk walking, most days, plus two days of muscle and strength training exercises each week. Children and adolescents should get 60 minutes of exercise or playtime each day.

Maintain a healthy weight

Excess body fat, especially in your abdomen, increases chronic inflammation.¹ Obesity, a body mass index over 30, is also associated with deficiencies in nutrients essential for immune function, including vitamins and minerals, particularly A, B12, C, D, E, and zinc.³ This impairs the production and function of immune cells in adults and children.

Eating a healthy diet and getting plenty of exercise are the best ways to help maintain a healthy weight and support immune health.

Sleep more

Sleep is critical for optimal immune function. During sleep, your body activates certain immune cells that help fight pathogens. Sleep deprivation increases your risk of contracting colds or the flu. Additionally, poor sleep quality and sleep disorders are associated with an increased risk of chronic health conditions such as diabetes, heart

disease, and obesity. ^{4,5}

- Adults require seven to nine hours of sleep a night.⁵
- Preschoolers need up to 13 hours of sleep.⁵
- School-aged children (ages six to 12) should aim for nine to 12 hours of sleep each night.⁵
- Teens require eight to 10 hours of sleep each night.⁵

Consider these sleep-supporting habits:

- Avoid eating heavy meals or consuming caffeine-containing foods or beverages before bed.
- Create a dark, comfortable sleeping environment.
- Limit screen time before bed.
- Maintain a consistent sleep schedule.
- Wind down with relaxing activities.

Talk to your healthcare provider if you struggle with sleep, frequently feel tired, or fall asleep during the day. They may evaluate you for sleep apnea or recommend [a botanical supplement](#) to promote relaxation and faster sleep.

Manage stress

Chronic stress, as well as depression and loneliness, can cause dysregulated immune function, making you more susceptible to illness. Studies have also shown that the immune response to antiviral vaccines is less robust in those with anxiety or depression.⁶

Stress management techniques include:

- Deep breathing exercises
- Meditation or mindfulness practice
- Regular physical activity
- Social time and connections with family and friends
- Spending time in nature

Supplement for additional support

Gaps in your diet, as well as physical or emotional stressors, can leave you vulnerable and more susceptible to illnesses. Fall is an ideal time to add immune support supplements to your family's protocol. Talk to your healthcare provider about your needs and risks, and consider adding the following supplements:⁷

- A [multivitamin/mineral formula](#) with essential immune-support nutrients, including vitamins A, C, and D, and minerals such as selenium and zinc.

- [A broad-spectrum probiotic](#). Probiotics can help strengthen the intestinal barrier integrity, protect against harmful microorganisms, and support a healthy response to inflammation.
- [Ther-Biotic® Postbiotic](#). Postbiotics are the bioactive metabolites formed by probiotics when they digest prebiotics. They have antioxidant, inflammation-balancing, immune system, and gut microbiota-modulating properties. Clinical studies suggest the key ingredient in Ther-Biotic® Postbiotic can aid the immune system in fighting colds, flu, and allergies and support digestive health.
- [Virathera™ CF](#). This synergistic blend of botanical adaptogens supports immune cell activity and promotes a healthy response to internal and external stressors.

The Bottom Line

Supporting immune health involves creating a solid foundation of healthy habits and using science-based supplements for extra support when needed. By taking a proactive approach this fall, you can help optimize your body's natural defense systems and promote overall wellness for yourself and your family.

References

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