



IMMUNITY

strategies for improving immunity



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Our immune system is composed of cells, tissues, organs, and other substances, and it helps the body fight infections and other diseases. Our immunity relies on many factors — some of which we have control over and some we do not. While the science can be a bit murky around specific things anyone can do to help strengthen their immune system — and things can vary widely from person to person — there are several habits associated with a robust and healthy line of defense.



MOVE YOUR BODY

Whether you're a fan of dance cardio or more of a wake-and-walk kind of person, regular exercise is important to an overall healthy lifestyle. The CDC recommends at least 2 1/2 hours of moderate-intensity cardio (i.e., brisk walking) every week. Plus, it can positively impact our body's ability to stave off infection. Exercise has numerous benefits related to cardiovascular health, blood pressure, weight maintenance, mood and mental health. In all of these ways, exercise proves beneficial to immune health, as well as improving circulation, which may help the body's immune system work more effectively as well.

HAVE A STRONG SENSE OF PURPOSE

Having a powerful "reason to get up in the morning" and involving yourself in meaningful activities that help others can have a profound influence on our health and well-being. Several fascinating studies have linked regular volunteer activity with healthy immune function along with a whole host of other components of good health.



REDUCE EXTRA STRESS

Whether you read a book, take a trip, socialize with friends or do yoga, reducing stress is vital. Immune systems come under attack more easily when your body is stressed, making it much easier for you to get sick. Try implementing regular breathing exercises during your day, stopping to close your eyes and take three deep breaths before continuing on with important tasks. Slowing the breath and focusing on exhalation can trigger your vagus nerve, which in turn kicks your body into rest-and-digest mode.



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GET SLEEP

Sleep is a critical time to rebuild and restore body systems, and it plays a major role in our immune system's functionality and health. If we're getting poor sleep either in quality, quantity or both it can negatively impact our immune system. The good news? You can actively work on improving your sleep hygiene — or the quality of your shut-eye. Start with limiting screen time, blacking out your room, and not eating too close to bed and removing distractions before bed. Also try engaging in practices that help with sleep, like meditation or receiving acupuncture treatments. Our body's natural ability to fight infections and regenerate and renew itself happens while we sleep, particularly in a deep sleep state, so engaging in these practices that help us get to those stages of sleep is essential.

EAT PROBIOTICS

Consuming probiotic-rich foods is a little known but highly effective way to promote a healthy immune system. They actively repopulate your gut with healthy bacteria and include yogurt, kefir, sauerkraut, pickles, apple cider vinegar, miso and kimchi — to name a few.



STAY SOCIAL (VIRTUALLY COUNTS)

The impact of social isolation is tremendous, and a subjective feeling of loneliness has been found to be as dangerous to the body as smoking 15 cigarettes/day. Maintaining meaningful connections with others (like friends, family members, colleagues, neighbors) is an often overlooked part of good mental and physical health.

CLEAN UP YOUR DIET

If you want great immunity, lean into eating clean, whole, non-processed foods. Overeating processed foods, added sugar, artificial sweeteners, caffeine and alcohol can definitely harm your immune function. All of these foods increase inflammation in the body or affect insulin levels, which can exacerbate chronic conditions and their symptoms.

Furthermore, these foods also often result in energy crashes, which cause you to eat more and often eat irrationally. Instead, seek foods high in vitamins, antioxidants and fiber. Think fresh vegetables, fruits and lean meats, like chicken or fish.

