Foods that Support the Immune System

Your immune system is your body’s own powerful army. It puts up an array of sophisticated defenses against threats from within and without. The best way to boost your immune system is through a diet rich in vitamins and minerals. Everything you eat and drink matters. The right mix can help you be healthier now and in the future. Including the following nutrients in your diet can help you improve and maintain a healthy body.

**Vitamin A** - Vitamin A keeps eyes and skin healthy and helps to protect against infections. It is found in:

- Liver
- Egg yolks
- Salmon
- Green leafy vegetables
- Dairy products
- Fortified cereals

Vitamin A can also be made in the body from a substance found in some fruits and vegetables such as:

- Cantaloupes
- Carrots
- Spinach
- Sweet potatoes

**Vitamin C** - Vitamin C is also called ascorbic acid. It helps fight infections, heal wounds, and keep teeth, gums, and tissues healthy. It is an antioxidant that helps prevent cell damage. Vitamin C also aids in iron absorption. It is found in all fruits and vegetables especially:

- Citrus fruits such as oranges, grapefruit, and orange juice
- Strawberries
- Cantaloupe
- Red and green peppers
- Tomatoes
- Broccoli
- Brussel sprouts
- Leafy greens
- Potatoes

**Vitamin D** - Vitamin D is perhaps one of the immune system’s strongest allies against disease. It helps the body use calcium and phosphorus to make strong bones and teeth. Skin exposed to sunshine can also make vitamin D. Foods that contain vitamin D are:

- Fatty fish, such as salmon
- Egg yolks
- Milk and other dairy products
- Fortified breakfast cereals
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**Vitamin E** - Vitamin E boosts the immune system and helps keep blood clots from forming. It also helps prevent cell damage caused by free radicals (highly reactive chemicals). Vitamin E is a type of antioxidant and is found in:

- Seeds and nuts, such as sunflower seeds and almonds
- Leafy green vegetables
- Avocado
- Olive oil
- Spinach

**Selenium** - Selenium protects cells from oxidation. It is important for a healthy immune system, thyroid hormone metabolism, and protection from infection. Selenium can be found in:

- Whole grains
- Brazil nuts
- Seafood such as shrimp, tuna, and sardines
- Chicken
- Beef
- Pork
- Dairy products

**Zinc** - Zinc is necessary for many chemical reactions that occur in your body and it helps the immune system work properly. Foods rich in zinc include:

- Beans
- Nuts
- Whole grains
- Red meat
- Oysters, crabs, and lobster

*Source: Adapted from United States Department of Agriculture; National Cancer Institute; National Institute of Health*