

Smart ways to boost your immunity

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One of the most important things standing between you and getting sick is your immune system (immunity). When it comes to fighting viruses, everyday precautions such as washing your hands often and avoiding sick people are key. But experts say that boosting your immune system may also give you an edge in staying healthy.



Here are eight smart steps to add to your to-do list now:

1. An apple a day

Keep your gut healthy by thinking variety and fibre. Eat a wide range of fruits and vegetables (five servings daily), and go for seeds, olive oils, garlic, protein-rich foods, whole grains and fish. Fatty fish provides not only protein, but also omega-3 fatty acids, and fish oil reduces inflammatory reactions.

2. Stay active

Regular exercise supports the immune system by decreasing stress hormone production, which reduces your chances of getting sick. Just 30 minutes five times a week will do wonders and give our bodies that much needed energy to fight off unwanted germs. As an added bonus, endorphins from exercise also reduce stress. The key to exercise, however, is to do it in moderation. Exercising for more than an hour a day could make you more vulnerable to illness. Exercising outdoors increases your exposure to natural light. Light does more than produce vitamin D.

3. Snooze so you don't lose

One of the most evidence-supported ways to stay healthy, though, also happens to be natural and free – sleep. When you're sleep-deprived, your body churns out stress hormones like cortisol to keep you awake and alert, which can suppress your immune system. Just one night of poor sleep can reduce your immune cells by as much as 70%, research shows. A study published in the journal *Sleep*, found that people who got at least seven hours of shut-eye a night, were four times less likely to come down with a cold than those who clocked less than six.

4. Drink plenty of water, not alcohol

Without water your system becomes sluggish, and your skin and mucous membranes might not be able to manage

respiratory infections effectively. Drink tap, filtered or sparkling water or opt for caffeine free herbal teas such as rooibos to keep yourself well-hydrated.

If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation. The occasional glass of wine in moderation is unlikely to be a threat but avoid overdoing it. Excessive alcohol use can also impair the immune system and the body's ability to heal itself, according to research.

5. Brush and floss

Dental health is essential for a strong immune system. Keep your gums healthy as oral bacteria may enter your bloodstream through small ulcers that develop in the gum tissue.

6. Stop smoking

Smoking damages your immune system and puts you at risk of cancer and heart disease. If you have to smoke, do it away from other people, especially children.



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7. Stay on top of stress

There's a strong link between your immune health and your mental health. When you're under chronic stress or anxiety, your body produces stress hormones that suppress your immune system.

Although you can't avoid stress in your life, you can adopt strategies to help you manage it better. Laugh, meditate, play music, dance or indulge yourself in a hot bath. When you're happy, you're far less likely to get sick.

8. Find the right remedies

Regardless of how healthy you feel and are, going for health screenings and full medical check-ups at least once a year is essential. Health and wellness start with a balanced nutritious diet, regular physical activity and taking care of yourself. Part of this entails visiting a medical clinic for health check-ups as this will help to prevent diseases.

Remember, multivitamins are no substitute for a healthy diet. Ensure your supplement includes vitamin A, vitamin B6, vitamin B12, vitamin D, vitamin E, folic acid, magnesium, selenium, zinc, chromium, copper, and iron.

The bottom line is that there is no magic pill or a specific food guaranteed to bolster your immune system and protect you from the new coronavirus. But there are real ways you can take care of yourself and give your immune system the best chance to do its job against respiratory illness.

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