

Nourish Your Immune System

No one likes to get sick. Our immune system functions throughout our entire body to protect us from infections such as the common cold to serious health conditions.

Some immune cells, which are our white blood cells, circulate through the body and others reside in specific tissues including our spleen and tonsils. The skin is our body's first line of defense against germs. Our skin cells produce proteins that can fight off germs. Immune cells also recognize other substances that enter our bodies and attempt to remove them if the substance appears to be harmful to use.

You can keep your immune system healthy by following these tips:

1. **Wash your hands often. Scrub for at least 20 seconds with soap.** Did you know that cold viruses can survive on indoor surfaces for up to seven days, with their ability to cause infections decreasing after 24 hours? Infectious flu viruses can survive on the hands for 15 minutes and on hard surfaces for 24 hours. Flu viruses also can survive as air droplets for several hours.
2. **Exercise regularly.** Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate activity on five or more days of the week. Regular exercise can benefit your entire body by helping to maintain a healthy body weight. Exercise can also keep you in good health, which allows your immune system to work properly.
3. **Eat a healthy diet.** Consume plenty of fruits and vegetables, lean protein, healthful fats, low-fat dairy or calcium alternative and whole grains. Aim for foods rich in vitamin A, C, E and D, and the mineral selenium. Limit fatty foods and alcohol that can suppress the immune system. Also foods eaten in excess can lead to obesity, which can cause immune system function to be reduced.
4. **Stay hydrated.** Water plays many important roles in your body, including your immune system. A fluid made up mostly of water, carries important infection fighting immune cells in your circulatory system called lymph. Being dehydrated slows down the movement of lymph. Drinking plenty of water throughout the day helps.
5. **Get plenty of sleep.** Keep a regular sleep schedule and aim for at least seven hours a night. Keep your bedroom at an appropriate temperature. Sign off from your technology at least an hour before bedtime.
6. **Manage stress.** Certain types of stress can weaken our immune system and make us more susceptible to infection. Get enough sleep, manage your blood pressure and focus on leading a healthy lifestyle. Sleep deprivation can depress the immune system's disease-fighting power by reducing the production of T cells.
7. **Limit alcohol.** Alcohol is one substance that can suppress our immune system. If you do drink, drink in moderation. Moderation is defined as one drink a day for women and two drinks a day for men. One drink is 5 ounces of wine, 12 ounces of beer or 1.5 ounces of 80 proof spirits.
8. **Take steps to avoid infection.** There are some additional steps you can take including practicing food safety when preparing food at home to reduce the spread of bacteria. Wash fruits and vegetables before eating. Thaw food in the refrigerator, in cold water or the microwave. Cook meat and seafood thoroughly and keep raw cooked foods separately.