



BFLA NUTRITION

Building your Immune System

ONLINE RESEARCH TOOL USED IN THIS IMMUNE SYSTEM PROCESS

15 Foods That Boost the Immune System

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Immune system boosters

Feeding your body certain foods may help keep your [immune system](#) strong.

If you're looking for ways to prevent colds, the flu, and other infections, your first step should be a visit to your local grocery store. Plan your meals to include these 15 powerful immune system boosters.

An important note

No supplement will cure or prevent disease.

With the 2019/20 coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic, it's especially important to understand that no supplement, diet, or other lifestyle modification other than physical distancing, also known as social distancing, and proper hygiene practices can protect you from COVID-19.

Currently, no research supports the use of any supplement to protect against COVID-19 specifically.

1. Citrus fruits



Most people turn straight to [vitamin C](#) after they've caught a cold. That's because it helps build up your immune system.

Vitamin C is thought to increase the production of white blood cells, which are key to fighting infections.

Almost all [citrus fruits](#) are high in vitamin C. With such a variety to choose from, it's easy to add a squeeze of this vitamin to any meal.

Popular citrus fruits include:

- [grapefruit](#)
- [oranges](#)
- [clementines](#)
- [tangerines](#)
- [lemons](#)

- [limes](#)

Because your body doesn't produce or store it, you [need daily vitamin C](#) for continued health.

The [recommended daily amount](#) for most adults is:

- 75 mg for women
- 90 mg for men

If you opt for supplements, avoid taking more than 2,000 milligrams (mg) a day.

Also keep in mind that while vitamin C might help you recover from a cold quicker, there's [no evidence yet](#) that it's effective against the [new coronavirus](#), SARS-CoV-2.

2. Red bell peppers



If you think citrus fruits have the most vitamin C of any fruit or vegetable, think again. Ounce for ounce, red [bell peppers](#) contain almost 3 times as much vitamin C ([127 mg Trusted Source](#)) as a Florida orange ([45 mg Trusted Source](#)). They're also a rich source of [beta carotene](#).

Besides boosting your immune system, vitamin C may help you [maintain healthy skin](#). Beta carotene, which your body converts into [vitamin A](#), helps keep your eyes and skin healthy.

3. Broccoli



[Broccoli](#) is supercharged with vitamins and minerals. Packed with vitamins A, C, and E, as well as [fiber](#) and many other [antioxidants](#), broccoli is one of the healthiest vegetables you can put on your plate.

The key to keeping its power intact is to cook it as little as possible — or better yet, not at all. [ResearchTrusted Source](#) has shown that [steaming](#) is the best way to keep more nutrients in the food.

4. Garlic



[Garlic](#) is found in almost every cuisine in the world. It adds a little zing to food and it's a must-have for your health.

Early civilizations recognized its value in fighting infections. Garlic may also slow down hardening of the arteries, and there's [weak evidence](#) that it helps lower blood pressure.

Garlic's [immune-boosting properties](#) seem to come from a heavy concentration of sulfur-containing compounds, such as allicin.

5. Ginger



[Ginger](#) is another ingredient many turn to after getting sick. Ginger may help decrease inflammation, which can help reduce a [sore throat](#) and inflammatory illnesses. Ginger may help with [nausea](#) as well.

While it's used in many sweet desserts, ginger packs some heat in the form of gingerol, a relative of capsaicin.

Ginger may also [decrease chronic pain](#)[Trusted Source](#) and might even possess [cholesterol-lowering properties](#)[Trusted Source](#).

6. Spinach



[Spinach](#) made our list not just because it's rich in vitamin C — it's also packed with numerous antioxidants and beta carotene, which may both increase the infection-fighting ability of our immune systems.

Similar to broccoli, spinach is healthiest when it's cooked as little as possible so that it retains its nutrients. However, light cooking makes it easier to absorb the vitamin A and allows other nutrients to be released from [oxalic acid](#), an antinutrient. [Check out some spinach recipes here.](#)

7. Yogurt



Look for [yogurts](#) that have the phrase “live and active cultures” printed on the label, like [Greek yogurt](#). These cultures may stimulate your immune system to help fight diseases.

Try to get plain yogurts rather than the kind that are flavored and loaded with sugar. You can sweeten plain yogurt yourself with healthy fruits and a drizzle of [honey](#) instead.

Yogurt can also be a great source of [vitamin D](#), so try to select brands fortified with this vitamin. Vitamin D helps regulate the immune system and is thought to boost our body’s natural defenses against diseases.

[Clinical trials](#) are even in the works to study [its possible effects on COVID-19](#).

8. Almonds



When it comes to preventing and fighting off colds, [vitamin E](#) tends to take a backseat to vitamin C. However, this powerful antioxidant is key to a healthy immune system.

It's a fat-soluble vitamin, which means it requires the presence of fat to be absorbed properly. Nuts, such as [almonds](#), are packed with the vitamin and also have healthy fats.

Adults only need about [15 mg](#) of vitamin E each day. A half-cup serving of almonds, which is about 46 whole, shelled almonds, provides [around 100 percent](#) [Trusted Source](#) of the recommended daily amount.

9. Sunflower seeds



Sunflower seeds are full of nutrients, including [phosphorous](#), [magnesium](#), and vitamins B-6 and E.

Vitamin E is important in regulating and maintaining immune system function. Other foods with high amounts of vitamin E include [avocados](#) and dark [leafy greens](#).

Sunflower seeds are also incredibly high in selenium. Just 1 ounce contains [nearly half](#) [Trusted Source](#) the selenium that the average adult needs daily. A variety of [studies](#), mostly performed on animals, have looked at its potential to combat viral infections such as [swine flu \(H1N1\)](#).

10. Turmeric



You may know [turmeric](#) as a key ingredient in many curries. This bright yellow, bitter spice has also been used for years as an anti-inflammatory in treating both [osteoarthritis](#) and [rheumatoid arthritis](#).

[ResearchTrusted Source](#) shows that high concentrations of curcumin, which gives turmeric its distinctive color, can help decrease exercise-induced muscle damage. Curcumin has promise as an immune booster (based on findings from [animal studies](#)) and [an antiviral](#). More research is needed.

11. Green tea



Both [green and black teas](#) are packed with flavonoids, a type of antioxidant. Where [green tea](#) really excels is in its levels of epigallocatechin gallate (EGCG), another powerful antioxidant.

In [studies](#), EGCG has been shown to enhance immune function. The fermentation process black tea goes through destroys a lot of the EGCG. Green tea, on the other hand, is steamed and not fermented, so the EGCG is preserved.

Green tea is also a good source of the amino acid [L-theanine](#). L-theanine may aid in the production of germ-fighting compounds in your T cells.

12. Papaya



[Papaya](#) is another fruit loaded with vitamin C. You can find [doubleTrusted Source](#) the daily recommended amount of vitamin C in a single medium fruit. Papayas also have a digestive enzyme called papain that has anti-inflammatory effects.

Papayas have decent amounts of [potassium](#), magnesium, and [folate](#), all of which are beneficial to your overall health.

13. Kiwi



Like papayas, [kiwis](#) are naturally full of a ton of essential nutrients, including folate, potassium, [vitamin K](#), and vitamin C.

Vitamin C boosts the white blood cells to fight infection, while kiwi's other nutrients keep the rest of your body functioning properly.

14. Poultry



When you're sick and you reach for chicken soup, it's more than just the placebo effect that makes you feel better. The soup may help lower inflammation, which could improve symptoms of a cold.

Poultry, such as chicken and turkey, is high in [vitamin B-6](#). About 3 ounces of light turkey or chicken meat contains [nearly one-third](#) of your daily recommended amount of B-6.

Vitamin B-6 is an important player in many of the chemical reactions that happen in the body. It's also vital to the formation of new and healthy [red blood cells](#).

[Stock or broth](#) made by boiling chicken bones contains gelatin, chondroitin, and other nutrients helpful for gut healing and immunity.

15. Shellfish



[Shellfish](#) isn't what jumps to mind for many who are trying to boost their immune system, but some types of shellfish are packed with [zinc](#).

Zinc doesn't get as much attention as many other vitamins and minerals, but our bodies need it so that our immune cells can function as intended.

Varieties of shellfish that are high in zinc include:

- oysters
- crab
- lobster
- mussels

Keep in mind that you don't want to have more than the [daily recommended amount](#) of zinc in your diet:

- 11 mg for adult men

- 8 mg for most adult women

[Too much zinc](#) can actually inhibit immune system function.

More ways to prevent infections

Variety is the key to proper nutrition. Eating just one of these foods won't be enough to help fight off the [flu](#) or other infections, even if you eat it constantly. Pay attention to serving sizes and recommended daily intake so that you don't get too much of a single vitamin and too little of others.

Eating right is a great start, and there are other things you can do to protect you and your family from the flu, [cold](#), and other illnesses.

Start with these [flu prevention basics](#) and then read these 7 tips for [flu-proofing your home](#). Perhaps most importantly, get your annual [flu vaccine](#) to protect yourself and others.