

# Sugar's Impact on One's Immune System

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Halloween candy, Thanksgiving pies, Christmas cookies, Starbucks drinks— a holiday season filled with festivities and sugary treats! Do you know how sugar impacts you and your students' immune systems? We definitely see an uptick in illnesses in November and December. We want our students in school every day because there is no 100% substitute for in-classroom learning and discussion; however, we realize sick days are sometimes necessary for students and staff throughout the year. One thing to focus on during this season is you and your family's nutrition because it has a direct impact on your immune system.

Spikes in sugar intake suppress our immune system. When our immune system is “down,” we are more likely to get sick.

**If you regularly eat foods and drink beverages that contain a lot of sugar or refined carbs, you are lowering your body's ability to fight off germs.** If you eat sugar when you are sick, you are halting your recovery because the sugar causes inflammation and further lowers your immune system.

Refined carbs are a hidden sugar culprit. **When we eat refined carbs, our bodies quickly break them down into sugar.** What are refined carbs? Anything with white flour— bagels, bread, freezer waffles, English muffins, pastries, muffins, pasta— many cereals, pizza dough, white rice, etc), If you have a bagel sandwich and juice for breakfast, quesadilla for lunch, pasta for dinner, and a pop during the day, you are consuming sugar at every meal and your immune system is lowered for the entire day. This zaps your energy, affects your sleep, and makes you more likely to get sick.

Regularly eating excessive sugar can also affect our gut health, making it harder for our bodies to absorb the vitamins and minerals it needs. It can also stop the growth of the good bacteria in our gut.

This isn't to say you can't have a sweet treat. Indulge and enjoy occasionally, but it shouldn't be a regular occurrence, even in the holiday season! Look at your overall day- every meal should not include sugar and refined carbs! If the ingredient list is crazy long and includes lots of things you can't pronounce, it's processed. Focus on having fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, and whole grains daily. Drink plenty of water. Remember that sugar is addictive, and it takes time to lower your cravings.

Breakfast ideas:

- Plain Greek yogurt, fresh or frozen berries, granola (read the label on the granola!)
- Scrambled or fried eggs, wrapped in a whole wheat tortilla or served with whole-grain toast. Bonus if you add some veggies to your eggs

- Smoothie: Blend berries, banana, protein powder, spinach, and peanut butter with some water. (Check the peanut butter label. It should just be peanuts and salt!)
- Oatmeal- cook with water or milk and top with nuts, seeds, fruit, and/or honey (not the flavored packets of oatmeal)

#### Lunch Ideas:

- Salad: Use leftover chicken or steak, add lettuce and your choice of vegetables. (Use taco sauce, hummus, or buffalo sauce for dressing.)
- Tuna salad sandwich or wrap- use whole grain bread or wrap
- Hard-boiled eggs with veggies and fruit
- Stir fry- whole grain rice, sauteed veggies and a choice of protein

#### Snacks:

- Protein balls- lots of recipes online
- Whole fruit with a hard-boiled egg or jerky
- Whole grain crackers, beef jerky, cheese
- Plain yogurt with fruit and nuts
- PBJ on whole-grain bread
- Rice cakes with hummus
- Make your own trail mix with seeds, nuts, fruit

#### Dinner Ideas:

- Burrito bowls- whole grain rice and protein of choice, topped with veggies and taco sauce
- Grilled chicken and veggies
- Fish of choice with veggie and baked potato (Use plain Greek yogurt over sour cream)
- Stir fry
- Loaded baked potatoes- topped with meat, roasted veggies, shredded cheese, and hot sauce
- Look for whole-grain or chickpea pasta. Any pasta with 5 or more grams of fiber per serving is a good choice.
- Google fast, weeknight dinner ideas with whole foods and no refined carbs to get some ideas. You can use many AI sites for recipes. Type in “give me a recipe using chicken and broccoli without refined “carbs” and AI will give you a few options!

Any time you have a snack, make sure it has protein and a non-refined carb. Your meals should also have protein, carbs, fat, and color (like from fruit and veggies, not artificial dyes).