

Tips to Boost Your Immune System

And Favorite Healthy Summer Recipes to Try

From the Kitchen of McLean Executive Chef, Karen Pelletier

Eating a healthy, balanced diet can help you to lower your risk for illness, keep trim and give you lots of energy to function. This includes selecting menus with nutritious foods that add up to the right number of calories, and eliminating unhealthy choices from your diet.

A nutrient-rich diet of fruits and vegetables rich in vitamins C and E, beta-carotene and zinc are essential to good health. So is maintaining a low-sugar, low-fat diet that incorporates whole grains and lean proteins. Healthy fats found in olive oil and salmon are key in boosting your immune system and fighting off inflammation.

This may seem a little too simplistic. In reality, it does take a bit of work to eat a healthy, balanced diet. While you are planning the daily menu for you and your family, have fun, experiment with new recipes, and try to include the following elements into each day:

- 3 ounces of meat – One serving is about the size of a deck of cards.
- 1 cup of pasta – One serving is about the size of a tightly closed fist.
- 2 tablespoons of peanut butter – One serving is about the size of a ping-pong ball.
- 2 cups of green leafy vegetables – One serving is about the size of two closed fists.
- 2 ounces of cheese – One serving is about the size of 2 dominoes.
- 1 cup of green vegetables – One serving is about the size of a tennis ball

These are a couple of my favorite, “go to” recipes to try!

Overnight No-Cook Oatmeal

4 servings

Ingredients:

- 2 1/2 cup skim milk
- 1 Tbsp. honey
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 3 1/2 cups rolled oats- old fashioned (not instant or quick-cooking)
- 2 bananas, halved lengthwise and sliced
- 1/4 cup chopped, unsalted pecans or walnuts

Directions:

1. In a large, re-sealable container or bowl, add milk, honey, and extract. Stir to combine, adding oats. Seal or cover; place in the refrigerator and let it sit overnight.
2. The next day, peel each banana. Halve each one lengthwise and slice. Divide sliced bananas and nuts over each oatmeal portion. Serve.

****Try adding some superfruits- blueberries, raspberries or cranberries.**

Grilled Chicken and Greek Salad

4 Servings

Ingredients:

- 2 cucumbers (seeded, diced)
- 4 medium tomatoes (diced)
- 1 medium red onion (diced)
- 2 Tbsp. fat-free feta cheese (crumbled)
- 1/4 cup chopped, fresh mint or parsley
- 2 limes (juiced)
- 1 Tbsp. extra virgin olive oil
- 1/2 tsp. black pepper
- 4oz. grilled chicken breast

Directions:

1. Mix cucumber, tomatoes, onion, feta and herbs in a bowl and refrigerate for 20 minutes.
2. In a small bowl, combine lime juice, oil and pepper – whisk well.
3. Pour over vegetable mixture top with grilled chicken breast and enjoy.

In addition to eating well, there are other ways to give your immune system a boost:

1. **Exercise** — Regular physical activity promotes circulation and heart health and relaxes the body and mind. 150 Minutes a week of moderate exercise can be accomplished through so many activities like including: walking, bike rides, swimming, hiking, and yoga.

2. **Reduce Stress** — Stress has been linked to a number of illnesses, including stomach problems and heart disease. Whether it's social stress, isolation or another form, stress can suppress our immune system, making us more susceptible to viruses. Exercise laughing, spending time with friends, relaxation exercises or making time to enjoy your hobbies are all ways to help reduce stress factors. Worry over COVID-19 has heightened stress in many individuals and if it becomes worrisome, it is best to consult your physician or talk it through with a trusted professional.
3. **Sleep** — Sleep is one of the best natural immune system boosters; it helps us respond better to stress and inflammation. Adults should get at least 7 hours of sleep each night.
4. **Wash Hands, Wash Hands, Wash Hands** — Washing hands regularly for a minimum of 20 seconds scrubs away germs. Use hot soapy water or hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
5. **Stay Positive** — A healthy outlook on life boosts endorphins, which make us feel good. In today's challenging environment, this may be a harder task, but it is important to plan feel good activities in your day, and ways to connect with others on a social level.
6. **Try Some Superfoods** — Foods like kale, broccoli, avocados, certain mushrooms, berries and others have shown to improve immune system performance. Some superfoods even boost cognitive function and help fight Alzheimer's disease.
7. **Consider Multivitamin or Herbal Supplements** — but consult your physician first.
8. **Stay Hydrated** — Dehydration can cause headaches and hinder your physical performance, attention span, mood, digestion, and heart and kidney function. These complications can increase your susceptibility to illness. The older we get, we tend to feel thirst less frequently than younger people. But seniors need at least 8-9 glasses of fluid a day to keep mucous membranes moist, which lowers the chances of flu or colds. Avoid alcoholic and caffeinated drinks. Soups, jello, and popsicles are all ways to increase fluid intake.

While none of these tips can promise to eliminate disease, including COVID- 19, they are all important in doing your best to maintain a healthy lifestyle long-term.