

January 2016 | teamusa.org | Becca Rick | Diet & Nutrition – Immune Health

[NOTE: Some sentiments contained within "What We're Reading" articles may not strictly conform with Simple Again's nutritional outlook. We read articles containing opposing information all the time and derive our nutritional philosophies from the latest science, the opinions of experts worldwide and our anecdotal experiences in the field. We keep an open mind and a strong affinity for fact-based evidence to help make the world of nutrition "Simple Again" for you.]

Foods to Boost Immunity

Hello, sick season! While we can certainly take all the right steps to avoid sickness, it's inevitable (for most of us) to entirely avoid contact with others at work, in the gym, at school, etc.

Proper rest and recovery, hydration, exercise and nutrition all work to support immune health. Choking down a handful of antioxidants, vitamins, minerals and anything else you may read that claims to keep you healthy may work against your efforts. Overriding the body's ability to maintain balance on its own by over-supplementing can be harmful. However, it is highly unlikely that you will overdose on the good stuff (vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, phytonutrients) if they are derived from food sources rather than supplements.



Here are four foods that would be wise to include within your nutrition routine, and may have the added benefit of supporting your body's immune system.

1. Fruits and Vegetables

Consuming a variety of fruits and vegetables will supply an array of vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and phytonutrients. Antioxidants help neutralize the free radicals that are produced in your system as result of a normal oxidation process. Free radical production is increased by physical activity, spending time at altitude, pollutants in the air, UV exposure and more. Phytonutrients (also known as phytochemicals) are chemicals derived from plants that have been shown to display protective properties. A few general and perhaps recognizable categories include resveratrol, carotenoids, phytoestrogens and flavonoids.

2. Honey

As shown in preliminary lab studies, honey has promising antibacterial benefits and possible impacts on pollen-triggered allergies. Incorporating locally sourced honey is most likely to show benefits to your body's disease-fighting powers. Feeling adventurous? Beekeeping is a growing trend!

3. Protein

One of the basic functions of protein in the body is providing the structure of antibodies, which protect your system by binding to foreign substances such as unwanted bacteria and viruses. So, it stands to reason that taking in adequate dietary protein plays a definite role in fighting sickness.

4. Probiotics

Did you know that our guts contain trillions of bacteria? Probiotics are essentially the healthy bacteria in our guts. By definition per the World Gastroenterology Organisation Global Guidelines, probiotics are live microorganisms that confer a health benefit to the host (you) when administered in adequate amounts. Probiotics are critical in reestablishing healthy gut bacteria after a period of antibiotic treatment, which kills all gut bacteria (the good and the bad). In this case, a specific strain in pill form is likely needed. However, for general health and gut happiness, consume a variety of food-containing probiotics.

A few simple tips for incorporating these in your diet:

1. Because each food has its own nutritional profile, consuming a variety is key. Think of colors of the rainbow, and aim for at least two to three color categories for each meal and one to two for each snack to ensure you are feeding your body with a diverse set of substances.
2. Source a jar of local honey, and use it to sweeten lemon tea when you feel a cold coming on, or to add flavor to plain yogurt (probiotics & honey in one shot!).
3. Include a source of animal and/or plant protein in each meal and snack.
4. Try a new food source of probiotics each week for a month. Fermented foods such as sauerkraut, tempeh (fermented soy), miso, kimchi, kefir, some yogurts, kombucha (fermented tea) and fermented vegetables all count. Found one you love? Stick with it!

Tip: Save your pennies for a rainy day and try brewing your own kombucha or fermenting vegetables of your liking.

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