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A strong immune system is an unrivaled ally against infections. Each day we make diet and lifestyle choices that have a decisive impact on its effectiveness. Take advantage of the diet and lifestyle strategies below to keep your immune system working at its prime. With the highly infectious covid-19 virus looming large, never has there been a more urgent moment to take charge of your immunity – both for you, those you love, and the community at large.

1. PROTECT YOURSELF

Living in a protective bubble is not an option, but there are powerful steps you can take to reduce your exposure to infectious microbes!

- **Wash your hands regularly.** The more the better! Use soap and water (plain soap fine) and vigorously rub your hands together for at least 20 seconds. Rinse them thoroughly in running water. If soap and water are not available, hand sanitizer with at least 70% alcohol is your next best option.
- **Do not touch your face.** The majority of infections enter our bodies when our hands touch our faces, thus gaining entrance through our mouth, nose, or eyes.
- **Sneeze or cough into the crook of your elbow or into your inward turned shoulder.** There are less germs on these parts of your body relative to your hands and you are less likely to spread your germs to others.
- **Steer clear of people who are visibly ill** – coughing, sneezing etc. As a general rule, a six-foot distance is best.
- If there is a local outbreak in your community, **avoid public places and attending large gatherings to the best of your ability.**
- **Always follow the advice of local and national public health authorities for guidance related to specific outbreaks in your community.*****

2. GET YOUR SLEEP

Poor sleep decimates immune function. This has been repeatedly documented in studies. In one study, the risk of catching a cold virus increased 4-fold after just a few nights of poor sleep!

- Strive to get 7-8 hours of restful sleep a night.
- See [this link](#) to get all of my best advice on improving your sleep.

3. FEED YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM RIGHT

The foods you eat have a major impact on your immune system - for better or for worse.

- **Avoid the foods tied to poorer immunity** – processed foods, sweets/desserts, sugary beverages, and red meat, especially processed and fatty varieties. These foods lack fiber and other nutrients critical for immunity, increase inflammation in the body, and predispose to weight gain – all of which compromise immunity!
- **Enjoy an abundance of plant-based foods** – particularly fruits and [vegetables](#). Plant-based foods offer three prized ingredients for immune health – fiber, loads of vitamins and minerals, and potent phytochemicals.
- **Include a few weekly servings of seafood, ideally oily fish like salmon and sardines.** Oysters are another great seafood option. These foods offer high doses of [omega 3 fats](#), zinc, and selenium – vital for robust immune function.
- **Be sure to include the immune-boosting grand slammers.** These specific foods have been scientifically validated to boost immunity in one way or another. Your best choices are:
 - **Berries** - any variety, fresh or frozen. Berries are home to a host of immune enhancing agents – fiber, vitamin C, and potent antioxidant pigments, particularly ellagic acid. Strive for a cup a day.

- o **Pomegranates** – like berries, they are exploding with powerful plant pigments, including ellagic acid. Real fruit is much better than juice, as juice lacks the fiber and most of the phytochemicals found in the whole fruit.
- o **Oysters** – these mollusks are loaded with zinc, selenium, and omega 3 fats -vital nutrients for immune function. Plus, they offer special immune boosting peptides and polysaccharides.
- o **Mushrooms** – these unique, fungus-based foods are amazing for kicking up immune cell function. They provide special types of fiber, including beta glucan, that nourishes good gut bacteria known to enhance immunity. Common white button mushrooms, baby bellas, portabellas, oysters, chanterelles, and Asian varieties – enoki, shiitake, maitake, etc. are all fantastic. Cooking does not diminish there goodness.
- o **Extra virgin olive oil** – this super-healthy, plant-based fat is renowned for its robust polyphenol power. Polyphenols can boost the activity of immune-stimulating gut bacteria. It should be your oil of choice in the kitchen.
- o **Walnuts** – all nuts are good sources of nutrients helpful for immune function, including vitamin E and zinc, but only walnuts can claim a big dose of omega 3 fats and ellagic acid. Plus, they contain potent anti-inflammatory bioactives. Remember, inflammation puts a strain on the immune system, so anti-inflammatory foods do the immune system (and the entire body!) good.
- o **Hot peppers** – these spicy wonders are hot for immune health thanks to their capsaicin. This peppery compound is helpful in boosting immune cell activity, plus it lifts mood by triggering the release of endorphins, the brain’s natural morphine. Anything that lifts mood, naturally kicks up immune health.

- o **Green tea** – This wondrous beverage is chock full of remarkable goodness, including immune enhancing catechins - some known for their specific anti-viral properties. The most famous of all, EGCG, is also a potent anti-inflammatory agent. Steep your green tea, loose leaf or bagged, for at least 5 minutes, and add a bit of lemon or lime to ratchet up its effectiveness even more. Better yet, drink matcha, this way you end up consuming the entire leaf, maximizing your dose of EGCG and other catechins.
- o **Garlic** – this popular spice is revered for its antibacterial and antiviral prowess. Think of it as Mother Nature’s antibiotic. Plus, it shores up overall immune function. [For best results](#), chop or press raw garlic and let it sit for at least five minutes before you add it to your food.
- o **Brocco sprouts** – as members of the cruciferous family of veggies, all of which are treasures for immune health, these immature broccoli seedlings are the crown jewel. Cruciferous veggies are uniquely high in a potent, immune-boosting agent called sulforaphane, and brocco sprouts have up to 100 times more than mature broccoli! Sulforaphane kicks up Natural Killer cell activity, the body’s first line of defense against viruses.
- o **Fermented Foods** – kefir, yogurt, kimchi, kraut, miso, tempeh, kombucha, and any other fermented foods with live probiotic cultures are awesome for immune health. The beneficial bacteria in these special foods support the good bacteria in our guts, known as the microbiome, which is the command and control center of the immune system. You would be wise to include a small serving of a fermented food at each meal. That is what I strive to do. Remember, small doses are plenty powerful. Check out my [Nurture Your Microbiome](#) mini e-course, or one of the [many free resources](#) on my site related to this mind-blowing topic for additional guidance.

4. LIMIT ALCOHOL & STAY HYDRATED

- Alcohol suppresses immune function. Men, limit alcohol to two drinks or less daily. Women, limit to one drink or less.
- Red wine, because of its gut-boosting polyphenols, would be the smartest choice, if you choose to have a drink.
- Stay maximally hydrated with water. Strive to include 6-10 glasses of water daily. (The best sign of adequate hydration is pale yellow urine.)

5. DO NOT OVEREAT!

Overeating drains immune function in several key ways: it increases inflammation, accelerates aging, turns off survival genes, and causes weight gain.

- Strive to eat less, a little hunger here and there does the body good. Intermittent fasting and time-restricted eating are super-hot in the wellness world because they work! Strive to eat all of your food in a 6-12 hour window and complete your eating before the sun goes down. Another option is to limit eating two days a week to a single meal of 600-700 calories. Hunger triggers survival circuits in our DNA that in turn activate and amp up immune cell function.

6. MAKE SURE YOU MOVE

Engaging in physical activity is a firmly established means to boost immunity. In fact, it is arguably the quickest way to do so. A single bout of moderate aerobic activity, like a brisk walk, leads to measurable increases right away. On the flip side, physical inactivity stifles immune function.

- Strive for 30 -60 minutes of moderate or more physical activity most days. Brisk walking is fantastic. Yoga is also fantastic because it lowers inflammation and stress, both of which impair immunity.
- Choose what you like and know that any movement is helpful. **(Always check with your healthcare provider for the best exercise prescription if you suffer from any form of chronic disease.)**

7. DIG YOUR VITAMIN D

Vitamin D is a critical nutrient for healthy immune function, and low levels are rampant. This is a nutrient that we are supposed to get from the sun, as it is not present in foods, with a few rare exceptions.

- Optimize your Vitamin D level by:
 - o Safe, prudent sun exposure
 - o Making a proactive effort to regularly eat the few foods that provide vitamin D: oily fish like salmon, egg yolks, some mushrooms, and fortified dairy products.
 - o As a safety net, take 2,000 IU's daily of a D3 supplement, especially in non-summer months, or as directed by your healthcare provider based on your blood level. (Always check with your healthcare provider before taking any supplements).
 - o Get your blood level of vitamin D checked periodically and note that it will be at its yearly low at the beginning of March.

8. GET IN NATURE

Mother Nature is the best kept secret to better health! There are loads of uplifting studies showing that when we get in the outdoors, our immune systems benefit. From the immune-boosting phytoncides liberated by trees, to the beneficial microbes present in the soil, to the relaxing fractal visual patterns in Nature's canvas – the great outdoors unleashes a flood of beneficial hormonal and physiologic changes that you are nuts to miss out on.

- Strive to get outdoors often, particularly in areas with lots of natural elements – parks, tree lined streets, nature preserves, wooded areas, beaches, etc. Studies show that as little as 10 minutes in spaces with natural elements can reduce our stress and calm our minds (both of which are fantastic for immunity).
- Exercise outdoors when you can – this offers a double bonus.

- Consider bringing a little nature indoors by diffusing essential oils in your home. I always diffuse immune-boosting essential oils (my favorite is Japanese Hinoki) in my bedroom throughout the night. Other options are rosemary oil, tea tree oil, and frankincense oil.

9. STAY POSITIVE

Our emotional state has a very significant influence on our immune state. Studies show that positive emotions – happy, joyful, peaceful, relaxed, grateful, etc. kick up immunity, while negative emotions – sadness, anger, hostility, guilt, greed, negativity, etc. weaken immunity.

- Connect often with friends and family (assuming none of you are sick or quarantined!).
- Laugh – watch funny movies, surround yourself with funny people, etc. Even fake laughing can help relax us!
- Cultivate your spiritual life.
- Help those in need.
- Pray, mediate, practice deep breathing, keep a gratitude journal.
- Follow the other strategies above as all have been shown to improve mental well-being and reduce stress!

**Keep in mind that the elderly, those on immunosuppressant medications, those with chronic diseases, especially diabetes, heart disease, and immune-based disorders, and those who are obese are at the highest risk for poor immunity and greater susceptibility to infections.*

Visit [DrAnnWellness.Com](https://www.DrAnnWellness.Com) for more resources on evidence-based nutrition and lifestyle practices to boost your wellbeing!