

7 Immune boosting tips

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7 IMMUNE-SYSTEM BOOSTERS FOR COLD AND FLU SEASON

Unless you're a hermit living in some remote mountain shack, it's likely you've been surrounded by the first waves of cold and flu season — coughing, stuffy noses, sneezing and worse coming from everyone from your family members to your work colleagues.

While you can't always limit your exposure, there are ways to make your immune system as strong as possible as the viruses surge all around you.

Here are seven strategies to consider:

1. DRINK A LOT MORE WATER



Adequate hydration not only keeps your energy levels up, but also allows your body to shuttle toxins and waste materials out of your system faster. That improves your immune system's ability to fight infection.

Although water is the best beverage for hydration, you can also add in more foods with electrolytes and complex carbs, which help your body better absorb the fluids you drink. Opt for foods like celery, broth-based soups, fruits and vegetables and Greek yogurt.

2. PRIORITIZE SLEEP



Skimping on sleep, or even just getting by on the minimum, can lower your immune response because you're not giving your body the amount of restorative time it needs to fight off invaders. You need plenty of sleep to perform at your highest level. Thinking that you can 'get away with' fewer hours, or reducing the quality of your sleep with habits like Netflix binges, can make you more susceptible to colds.

3. DRINK LESS ALCOHOL



Tipping back a few too many — or even one more than you planned — can have a ripple effect that results in dehydration and poor sleep, the two immune boosters you need the most.

Alcohol clears the body usually after five or six hours, but you must keep the longer-term effects in mind when thinking about your health. For example, you might make unhealthy food choices, sleep less than you planned and skip workouts, which can all have a negative effect on your immune system.

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4. WASH YOUR HANDS OFTEN



Overuse of hand sanitizer and antimicrobial cleaners has been targeted as one source of antibiotic resistance by some researchers, but good old-fashioned hand washing is here to stay.

The Centres for Disease Control emphasizes that washing your hands with soap and water can help prevent infections because so many items in our everyday world potentially have germs that could make us sick. For instance, you might be vigilant about not touching bathroom door handles, but what about pushing elevator buttons or turning on the spigot of a shared water cooler?

You never know where cold germs might be lurking, so upping your hand washing during cold and flu season is a must.

5. FOCUS ON YOUR GUT

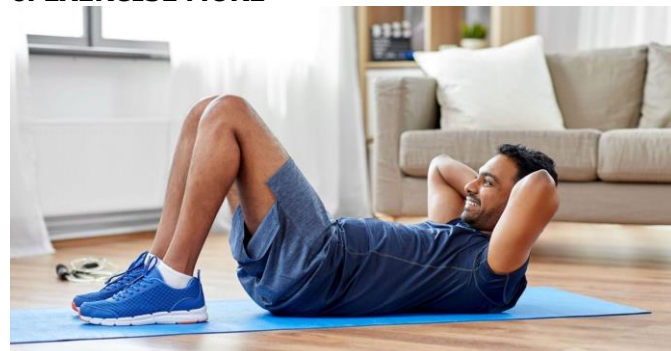


Better gut bacteria, better immune system? That's the conclusion of numerous studies, and it's not surprising since researchers at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine point out that a huge proportion of your immune system is in your gastrointestinal tract. Cells

lining the gut are responsible for producing antibodies that fight off bacteria and viruses.

Help them out with tactics that boost gut health, such as lowering stress, increasing exercise, eating more vegetables, and increasing consumption of probiotic-rich foods like yogurt and sauerkraut.

6. EXERCISE MORE



Another big tactic in the quest to stay healthy is sticking to your workout routine. Exercise improves the way your body's immune system fights disease, making it more efficient at fighting infection, according to the National Institutes of Health.

Even if you already have some of the early symptoms of a cold like a stuffy nose or fatigue, physical activity can be helpful, the NIH notes. That's because physical activity helps flush bacteria out of the lungs and increases your body temperature — a process that may prevent bacteria growth.

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7. DON'T TOUCH YOUR FACE



Whether it's resting your chin on your hand, rubbing your eyes, licking your fingers after making lunch or covertly picking your nose (we've all been there), you likely touch your face more than you realize. Even with frequent hand washing, germs can still accumulate on the hands in the between-washing times, and the CDC notes that germs can easily get into the body through the eyes, nose, and mouth.

THE BOTTOM LINE

In many ways, healthy habits build on each other, just like unhealthy habits do. For example, when you sleep better and eat more nutrient-dense foods, you tend to have more energy for working out and less time for stressing out. Putting a few immune-happy strategies in place first can help the rest fall in line — and maybe help you dodge some of those cold and flu bugs going around.