

Immune Boosters by Louise Racine

As cold and flu season approaches, it's time to take some steps to give your family a health boost to fend off whatever is floating around out there.

Feeding the immune system

Our immune system acts as our defence against all sorts of illnesses. Immune cells devour bacteria, fungi and other nasty abnormal cells. About 70% of our bodies' resources go towards supporting our immune system. If you or your kids are catching frequent colds, feeling rundown and listless, or taking a long time to recover from an illness or injury, it's likely that the immune system is compromised.

The health of our immune system is greatly impacted by dietary habits. Fats and highly refined foods harm the immune system -- only one teaspoon of sugar can inhibit the immune system for up to six hours. Likewise, healthy foods rich in certain nutrients will strengthen the immune system.

The most commonly known nutrient is vitamin C, which is both antiviral and antibacterial. Foods that contain vitamin C include broccoli, citrus fruit, sweet peppers, leafy greens, mango and cantaloupe. Fresh parsley, which is readily available year round, is an excellent source of vitamin C as well as vitamin A. Both vitamins are anti-oxidants that can help prevent many diseases. Beta carotene, which our bodies convert into vitamin A, stimulates and enhances our immune response and is found in carrots, leafy greens, and squash.

Zinc is another nutrient needed to keep healthy and strong. Nutritionally, we get zinc from eggs, mushrooms, spinach, nuts, pumpkin and sunflower seeds, and whole grains. Nuts, seeds and whole grains also supply us with another antioxidant, vitamin E. Onions, ginger and garlic are used mostly as seasonings; however, they also stimulate the immune system.

Getting kids onside

It's clear that a varied diet of whole foods is an excellent way to protect ourselves and our families from the ills of the season.

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