

# Natural Health Tips

## Strengthening Your Immune System

Virtually every type of illness – from the common cold, to more serious infections and to cancer – is related to the immune system. Exposed to the same pathogen (germ), different people will react differently, depending mainly on the strength of their immune system. In average, a healthy adult will contract two colds a year. People with significantly more colds and infectious illnesses are likely to have a weakened immune system.

A healthy immune system requires a multitude of nutrients present in the body in order to function properly. For instance, vitamin C is used by the white blood cells to fight infections and increases the production of antibodies. Vitamins A, E and beta-carotene stimulate the production of natural killer cells and helper T-cells (cells in the blood that attack pathogens), and cause macrophages to secrete a cancer fighting substance (tumor necrosis factor). The list goes on, showing the importance of the vitamins and some of the minerals (such as zinc and selenium) in maintaining a strong immune system.

A balanced diet, rich in fresh vegetables and fruits is the first and simplest means in achieving the desired balance of vitamins and minerals in the body. A list of the most nutrient-dense and beneficial foods for the immune system includes: avocado, papaya, guava, cantaloupe, apples, apricots, mango, strawberries, kiwi, grapefruit, berries, green leafy vegetables, squashes, whole grains, beans, fish, nuts, eggs, garlic, probiotic yogurt and the herbs echinacea, astragalus and dandelion.

Of similar importance with eating a diet that provides immune-boosting nutrients is avoiding foods, environmental factors and habits that weaken the immune system. Sugar is one of the main enemies of the immune system, by depleting the body of vitamins and reducing the fighting ability of the white blood cells. Alcohol in excess also produces a nutrients deficiency, inhibits the white cells division and lowers their efficiency. Smoking depletes the body from vitamin C. Antibiotics and steroid drugs hinder the activity of the immune system by several mechanisms and obesity was shown to also depress it by affecting white blood cells multiplication rate and reaction time at an infection site.

Last but not least, sleep and the immune system are closely interrelated, influencing each other (read more about this on <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11607924>).