



A strong immune system helps to keep a person healthy. Can specific foods boost the immune system?

The immune system consists of organs, cells, tissues, and proteins. Together, these carry out bodily processes that fight off pathogens, which are the viruses, bacteria, and foreign bodies that cause infection or disease.

When the immune system comes into contact with a pathogen, it triggers an immune response. The immune system releases antibodies, which attach to antigens on the pathogens and kill them.

Incorporating specific foods into the diet may strengthen a person's immune response.

## Which foods boost the immune system?

A healthful, balanced diet plays a vital role in staying well. The following foods may help to boost the immune system:

### **1. Citrus fruits**

Most people turn to vitamin C after they've caught a cold. That's because it helps build up your immune system. Vitamin C is thought to increase the production of white blood cells. These are key to fighting infections.

**Popular citrus fruits include:**

- Grapefruit
- Oranges
- Tangerines
- Lemons
- Limes
- Clementines



Because your body doesn't produce or store it, you need daily vitamin C for continued health. Almost all citrus fruits are high in vitamin C. With such a variety to choose from, it's easy to add a squeeze of this vitamin to any meal.

### **2. Red bell peppers**

If you think citrus fruits have the most vitamin C of any fruit or vegetable, think again. Ounce for ounce, red bell peppers contain twice as much vitamin C as citrus. They're also a rich source of beta carotene. Besides boosting your immune system, vitamin C may help maintain healthy skin. Beta carotene helps keep your eyes and skin healthy.



### **3. Broccoli**

Broccoli is supercharged with vitamins and minerals. Packed with vitamins A, C, and E, as well as many other antioxidants and fiber, broccoli is one of the healthiest vegetables you can put on your table. The key to keeping its power intact is to cook it as little as possible — or better yet, not at all.

### **4. Garlic**

Garlic is found in almost every cuisine in the world. It adds a little zing to food and it's a must-have for your health. Early civilizations recognized its value in fighting infections. Garlic's immune-boosting properties seem to come from a heavy concentration of sulfur-containing compounds, such as allicin.

### **5. Ginger**



Ginger is another ingredient many turn to after getting sick. Ginger may help decrease inflammation, which can help reduce a sore throat and other inflammatory illnesses. Ginger may also help decrease nausea.

While it's used in many sweet desserts, ginger packs some heat in the form of gingerol, a relative of capsaicin. Ginger may help decrease chronic pain and may possess cholesterol-lowering properties.

## **6. Spinach**

Spinach made our list not just because it's rich in vitamin C. It's also packed with numerous antioxidants and beta carotene, which may increase the infection-fighting ability of our immune systems. Similar to broccoli, spinach is healthiest when it's cooked as little as possible so that it retains its nutrients. However, light cooking enhances its vitamin A and allows other nutrients to be released from oxalic acid.



## **7. Yogurt**

Look for yogurts that have "live and active cultures" printed on the label, like Greek yogurt. These cultures may stimulate your immune system to help fight diseases. Try to get plain yogurts rather than the kinds that are preflavored and loaded with sugar. You can sweeten plain yogurt yourself with healthy fruits and a drizzle of honey instead.

Yogurt can also be a great source of vitamin D, so try to select brands fortified with vitamin D. Vitamin D helps regulate the immune system and is thought to boost our body's natural defenses against diseases.

## **8. Almonds**

When it comes to preventing and fighting off colds, vitamin E tends to take a backseat to vitamin C. However, vitamin E is key to a healthy immune system. It's a fat-soluble vitamin, meaning it requires the presence of fat to be absorbed properly. Nuts, such as almonds, are packed with the vitamin and also have healthy fats. A half-cup serving, which is about 46 whole, shelled almonds, provides nearly 100 percent of the recommended daily amount of vitamin E.

## **9. Turmeric**

You may know turmeric as a key ingredient in many curries. But this bright yellow, bitter spice has also been used for years as an anti-inflammatory in treating both osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis.

## **10. Green tea**

Both green and black teas are packed with flavonoids, a type of antioxidant. Where green tea really excels is in its levels of epigallocatechin gallate, or EGCG, another powerful antioxidant. EGCG has been shown to enhance immune function. The fermentation process black tea goes through destroys a lot of the EGCG. Green tea, on the other hand, is steamed and not fermented, so the EGCG is preserved.

Green tea is also a good source of the amino acid L-theanine. L-theanine may aid in the production of germ-fighting compounds in your T-cells.

## **11. Papaya**



Papaya is another fruit loaded with vitamin C. You can find 224 percent of the daily recommended amount of vitamin C in a single papaya. Papayas also have a digestive enzyme called papain that has anti-inflammatory effects.

Papayas have decent amounts of potassium, B vitamins, and folate, all of which are beneficial to your overall health.

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