



Foods to Help Fight the Flu

Adopted from AARP

The saying “you are what you eat” applies to your entire body, but it’s especially important when it comes to your immune system during flu season.

You can keep it in tip-top shape during this flu (and COVID) season, if you focus on a plant-based diet rich in whole unprocessed foods. One of the best eating patterns to illustrate this is the Mediterranean diet, which is rich in fruits, veggies, whole grains, nuts, beans and healthy fats like fatty fish and olive oil. A study published this past March in the journal *Frontiers in Nutrition* found that people who followed this diet were less likely to become infected by or die from COVID-19, suggesting it may provide an immune system boost that could protect you from other viral infections, too.

Below are more immunity boosting foods that research, and nutritionists, recommend for right now.

1. Green tea

Whether these particular tea leaves can really fend off the flu has been a source of debate among health researchers for years. But a new study published in July in the journal *Molecules* looked at more than eight studies involving more than 5,000 participants to conclude there really is ample evidence to believe the beverage — and specifically, the catechins that provide its antioxidant power — can help your immune system fend off influenza.

2. Sweet potatoes

They're a great source of beta carotene, a phytonutrient that helps your body make vitamin A. Beta carotene supports respiratory health by increasing the number of immune cells in the body. This is especially important for older adults, as our bodies make fewer immune cells as we age. But instead of cooking them with butter or brown sugar, try roasting them with olive oil, oregano and black pepper. You'll get additional benefits from the spices, and you're not loading up on sugar and saturated fat, both of which suppress your immune system.

3. Berries

They're a rich source of vitamin C, which stimulates production of infection fighting white blood cells. A 2018 [review](#) of studies found that berries increased levels of disease fighting cells in older adults, such as natural killer cells and T-cells. They also contain flavonoids, substances that have antioxidant properties and protect all your cells — including your immune system cells — from damage.

4. Beans

Chickpeas, black beans, kidney beans ... they're all high in zinc, which helps boost your body's production of white blood cells that can help fend off viruses such as the flu. Zinc deficiency has been linked to immune system dysfunction. Try at least a half a cup of cooked beans three times a week. You can throw them into soups, chili, salads or even rice dishes. For a healthy crunchy snack, roast chickpeas in some olive oil.

5. Nuts and seeds

These foods are rich in vitamin E, which plays a key role in your immune system by supporting the growth of T-cells, says Lauri Wright, chair of the Department of Nutrition and Dietetics at the University of North Florida. They're also a good source of omega-6 fatty acids. Walnuts are an especially good choice, as research shows they have a very positive effect on your gut microbiome. They also have more alpha linolenic acid — an essential fatty acid important for immune function — than any other type of nut.

6. Salmon

It's not plant based, but it is one of the few foods that provides vitamin D, which plays a huge role in regulating your immune system. A [2020 study](#) published in the journal *JAMA Network Open* found that people who had untreated vitamin D deficiency were almost twice as likely to test positive for COVID-19 as patients who had sufficient levels of the vitamin. A six-ounce salmon filet has about 600 IU of vitamin D, which is the recommended amount for adults between the ages of 19 – 70. It is close to the 800 IU that is recommended for people 70 and older. Another bonus: It's rich in omega-3 fatty acids, which have also been shown to strengthen your immune system.