

Support Your Immune System with Nutrition

BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE REGISTERED DIETITIAN AT
GEORGINA NURSE PRACTITIONER LED CLINIC

Flu season is here. This year, combined with the COVID-19 pandemic, we will need all the support for our immune system that we can get. Hopefully, you have already received the flu shot. Now you can also take a look at how to feed your body with the foods that support your immune system.

Colourful Vegetables & Fruits

Colourful vegetables and fruits contain vitamins A and C, which are important for supporting the immune system. Vitamin A helps the immune cells increase in number when needed to fight off infections. It can be found in orange coloured vegetables and fruits (such as sweet potatoes, carrots, pumpkin, bell peppers and apricots), spinach and broccoli. Vitamin C, an antioxidant, helps protect the immune cells themselves from damage. Vitamin C can be found in citrus fruits (such as oranges, grapefruit, tangerines, lemon, and lime) as well as berries and tomatoes. Try to eat at least 7 servings of vegetables and fruits every day to get the required levels of these nutrients. (Note: 1 serving = 1/2 cup of raw or cooked vegetables, 1 cup of raw leafy greens, or 1/2 cup of fruit)

Vitamin D

Vitamin D is increasingly being studied on its role in our immune system. Low levels of vitamin D have been linked to higher chances of getting the cold or flu, but more studies need to be done to clarify some mixed findings. For now, it is reasonable to consider taking a Vitamin D supplement, especially in the winter months.

Lean Animal or Vegetarian Protein

Protein foods are essential for our body's healing and recovery. In addition, these foods contain a number of vitamins and minerals that also support the immune system. Omega-3 fatty acids help to fight inflammation in our body and can be found specifically in fatty fish like salmon, trout, herring and sardines. Zinc, iron, copper, selenium, vitamins B6, B12 and E all help the immune cells to increase in number to fight infections, and to protect themselves from damage. Eat a variety of meat, poultry, seafood, nuts, seeds, legumes (beans, lentils, chickpeas) and dairy foods for optimum levels of these nutrients. Try to include one of the above sources at every meal, and specifically for fish at least 2-3 times a week.

Other

Aside from food, other lifestyle habits are also important. Lack of sleep and stress can suppress our immune system and its optimal functioning. Try to get 7-9 hours of sleep every night and find activities that help you manage stress.

References: 1) Linus Pauling Institute, Nutrition and the Immune System Infographic. Retrieved on Oct 29, 2020. 2) Harvard School of Public Health, Nutrition and Immunity. Retrieved on Oct 29, 2020.



Chicken Meatball Soup

4 SERVINGS

Nutrition Information (per serving):

202 Calories, Fat 9g (12% DV), Saturated Fat 2g (10% DV), Protein 8g, Carbohydrate 24g, Fibre 4g (14% DV), Sodium 265mg (12% DV)

Adapted recipe from Foodland Ontario

Ingredients:

1 Onion
 2 Garlic cloves, minced
 8oz Ground chicken
 1 Egg
 1/2 cup Whole wheat breadcrumbs
 1/4 cup Chopped fresh dill or parsley
 1/2 tsp Dried oregano leaves
 Salt and pepper
 2 tbsp Olive oil
 1 cup Carrots, diced
 1 cup Parsnips, diced
 1 cup Cabbage, chopped
 900mL Low sodium chicken broth
 1 Bay leaf
 1/2 cup Israeli couscous (pearl) or small pasta

Directions:

1. Mince 1 tbsp of onion; place in medium bowl. Chop remaining onion and set aside.
2. To medium bowl, add 1 clove of the garlic, ground chicken, egg, breadcrumbs, 2 tbsp of dill or parsley, oregano and 1/4 tsp each of salt and pepper; mix and combine evenly. Shape into 20 meatballs, about 1 tbsp each. Place on plate and refrigerate.
3. In a large covered pot, heat 2 tbsp of olive oil over medium high heat. Add remainder of onion and sauté until soft. Then add garlic and cook for one minute. Finally, add carrots, parsnips and cabbage and cook for another minute. Add broth, 2 cups of water, bay leaf and bring to boil. Cover, reduce heat to medium low and simmer 10 minutes, adjusting heat as necessary to maintain simmer.
4. Add meatballs and couscous or pasta. Cover and simmer 10 minutes or until meat is cooked through. Discard bay leaf. Stir in remaining dill or parsley and season with pepper to taste.