

Top Tips On How To Support Your Immune System And Keep You Healthy

By
Dr Marilyn Glenville PhD

We are living in unprecedented times and the government guidelines are being updated with each daily briefing. There are many things that are out of your direct control right now but your health is thankfully an area where you can make sure you are giving yourself the support it needs.

Making The Best Dietary Choices

Dietary choices are of course important and we all know fresh is best! But when fresh foods are scarce and frozen/canned in limited supply are there things you can do to really optimise the way your body takes in nutrients?

You may not know that for some foods, such as carrots and tomatoes, the beneficial antioxidant properties - such as beta-carotene (in carrots) and lycopene (in tomatoes) - of these foods are increased when they are cooked compared to when they are raw. And the longer those two are cooked the better.

Soups would be a good way to use these two vegetables, if you can cook from scratch even better because many of the canned soups will contain sugar.

When you are cooking tomatoes you can also add olive oil as this helps your body to absorb the antioxidant lycopene present in the tomatoes.

You can improve the absorption of iron from your food by combining it with vitamin C. Non-haem iron is found in plant based foods and haem iron is found in animal foods. The non-haem iron is not absorbed as well as the haem.

If you are eating more of a plant based diet then good non-haem sources of iron are beans, nuts, sprouted beans, cereals and green leafy vegetables and add some form of vitamin C - either lemon juice or drink some orange juice with your food.

You can also increase your absorption of calcium by making sure you have enough vitamin D. Your body can't absorb calcium well without enough vitamin D so eat foods rich in vitamin D such as oily fish and egg yolks and even consider taking a supplement at this time as vitamin D is crucial for supporting your immune function.

If your dietary choices are limited at the moment because of what you can buy, what should you prioritise?

You should always put the priority on fruits, vegetables and wholegrains in order to get as many different nutrients as possible plus good amounts of fibre. Fibre is important to 'feed' your beneficial bacteria in your gut and these bacteria are important for your immune function. Nuts and seeds will also be a good standby and you could include a palmful each day.

If you can't get fresh fruit or vegetables then frozen is just as good. Tinned vegetables and beans can also be good but make sure they do not contain sugar, which is often the case with canned sweetcorn.

Avoid buying processed foods or foods high in sugar because these could weaken your immune system.

Think about buying foods that contain beneficial bacteria or are fermented. These might be unusual foods for some people but 70% of your immune system is in your gut so it is important to keep up good levels of beneficial bacteria at this time.

Organic live yogurt would be good but of course the sell by date will be shorter on these than foods in a jar such as sauerkraut. Other fermented foods to try would be kefir, miso, kimchi and apple cider vinegar.

It is really important to eat as healthily as possible at this time, keep active as best you can and avoid foods that could weaken your body and immune system, including processed foods, soft fizzy drinks, sugary snacks and alcohol.

Can Supplementing Help?

The short answer is yes! The best supplements for overall health and wellbeing are a good all round multivitamin and mineral.

The multi will give you a good range of all the different vitamins and minerals that are going to be of benefit for your general good health.

These nutrients will be found in a good diet including fruits, vegetables, wholegrains, legumes, nuts and seeds but some of these may be in shorter supplies at the moment so having a multivitamin and mineral supplement can help to bridge some of those gaps.

There are a number of excellent supplements that are available to support your immunity and general health. I would recommend The Natural Health Practice which offer organic and vegan supplements, to find out more about their range, click <https://www.naturalhealthpractice.com/key-supplements>

However with such a wide variety of brands to choose from, it is important to look at the levels of the different nutrients and the form that they are in so that you are getting enough of each nutrient plus the form can make the difference as to how easily your body can absorb that vitamin or mineral.

Look for brands that have these qualities:

- Nutrients in their most bio-available form to aid absorption eg organic minerals like calcium citrate
- Hypoallergenic – free from sugar, gluten, starch, wheat, yeast, soya and dairy
- Free from genetically modified organisms (GMOs)
- Made without the use of artificial flavours, colours or preservatives
- No fillers, binders, anti-caking agents, artificial sweeteners etc.
- Vegan and vegetarian approved (except omega 3s)
- Choosing a brand that carries approved certification for reassurance to those with dietary, lifestyle or religious beliefs.

Vitamin C

This is the nutrient that often comes to mind first when we think of immune function and for good reason.

Vitamin C is essential to the health of immune cells and research has shown that good levels of vitamin C can help to reduce the length of time a person might suffer from an infection.

Unlike most animals (but like apes and guinea pigs), you can't manufacture vitamin C in your body - it has to come from food or from supplementation.

When choosing a Vitamin C supplement, look for one in the alkaline form of magnesium ascorbate as this is much gentler on the digestive system than the acidic form of vitamin C, ascorbic acid. It is important to choose the alkaline form of vitamin C if you have digestive issues.

Zinc

Zinc is another nutrient that springs to mind when thinking of supporting your immune system.

It is an essential mineral which means that it cannot be made in your body and like vitamin C has to come from food or in supplement form.

Zinc is needed by every cell in your body and affects your immune system in many ways. Research has shown that zinc deficient people can have increased susceptibility to a variety of pathogens.

Probiotics

We now know that 70% of the immune function is in the gut so at a time like this when you want maximum support for your immune system, having good levels of beneficial bacteria are even more important.

Your digestive system contains billions of bacteria, weighing in at around 1kg (about 2lbs). You need good levels of beneficial bacteria to help to keep control of pathogenic bacteria, parasites and yeasts.

Also for older people a probiotic could be helpful as the natural levels of these beneficial bacteria fall as we get older.

Having a probiotic that contains a prebiotic can be particularly helpful as the prebiotic is the food that the good bacteria use to thrive on so are useful in helping to make sure that the levels of your beneficial bacteria stay high.

Vitamin D

Vitamin D is an immune modulator, it can bring up your immune function if it is low and bring it down if overactive.

Your body does not expect to get much vitamin D from your food as it is made by the exposure of the skin to sunlight, so at this time of the year, your level could be generally low.

That is why Public Health England recommend that all adults and children over one year's old should be supplementing with vitamin D.

At a time like this you may want to know if your own vitamin D level is good enough to support your immune function.

You can do a simple vitamin D finger prick test at home and know whether you need to take extra vitamin D to support your immune function.

All Round Immunity Support

Nature also gives you other powerful substances to support you through these difficult times and there are some excellent traditional herbs that have been used for centuries to support immune function.

Traditional herbs like black elderberry and olive leaf are particularly helpful especially if combined with beta glucans which are found in oats and wholegrains.

These have a specific benefit for immune function and so do mushrooms such as reishi, maitake and shitake which contain good amounts of these beta glucans.

The restrictions to our normal way of life, which are important to be followed, may be in place for a number of months.

So think about how you can keep yourself healthy, what you eat and drink and which food supplements you take, as this will not only keep you well but also help support your immune function during these difficult times.

NEW 30 Minute Telephone Or Skype Consultation

If you would like to know more about keeping yourself well and how to support your immune system in these unprecedented times, my Glenville Nutrition Clinics are now offering a new 30-minute remote consultation by Skype or telephone at a special price.

Your consultation will be with one of my highly qualified nutritionists who will give you practical advice on how you can keep healthy in these unsettling times.

You'll also learn how to support your immune system and keep it healthy naturally.

Before your consultation, you will be sent a nutritional questionnaire to complete and return so that the information you receive during your telephone/skype consultation will be tailor made to your specific requirements and lifestyle.

To find out more or to book this special consultation just click

<https://glenvillenutrition.com/glenville-nutrition-clinic-remote-consultations/>

Dr Marilyn Glenville PhD is the UK's leading nutritionist specialising in women's health. She is the author of 16 internationally bestselling books on nutritional health and is The Former President of the Food and Health Forum at the Royal Society of Medicine.

Dr Glenville runs a several nutritional health clinics in Harley Street, London, Tunbridge Wells and Ireland www.marilynglenville.com.

In association with The Natural Health Practice Dr Glenville formulated their exclusive range of premium quality supplements. Dr Glenville also uses The Natural Health Practice supplements as her brand of choice in her nutrition clinics. www.naturalhealthpractice.com