

Boost Your Immune System!!!

Your immune system is comprised of many organs and cells operating together in harmony and include your thymus, your spleen, your lymph nodes and lymph tissue, stem cells, white blood cells, antibodies, and lymphokines. Keeping this system in top working order is critical for the successful prevention of infection and disease and the successful battle if an invading organism does slip past your armor of protection.

Filling your plate with plenty of brightly colored fruits and vegetables will ensure that you get healthful amounts of antioxidants and other protective phytochemicals that don't exist in meat and dairy products. Antioxidants fight free radicals. Free radicals can form when the multitude of daily biochemical reactions taking place in your body damage vital but very unstable oxygen molecules. Free radicals accelerate aging and can cause damage to your cells and organs. They can even penetrate cell membranes and alter or damage cell DNA, causing those cells to lose the ability to control their most basic functions. Cancer can occur if these damaged cells begin to multiply out of control.

There are several things you can do to keep your biological soldiers in top form:

- *Provide yourself with a daily arsenal of key nutrients.*

There are four key nutrients that work together to protect you: vitamin C, vitamin E, selenium, and carotenoids. Make sure to include these in your diet daily.

Vitamin C is responsible for patrolling the watery substances in your body such as your blood and the fluid within each of your cells. Plentiful amounts of vitamin C are found in citrus fruits, green, leafy vegetables, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, potatoes, sweet potatoes, bell peppers, cantaloupe, strawberries, kiwi, guava, tomatoes, and cabbage.

Vitamin E is actually not a single nutrient but a complex comprised of four tocopherols and four tocotrienols. Vitamin E is plentiful in legumes (beans, peas, and lentils), whole grains, nuts, and seeds.

Selenium is a trace mineral. Like vitamin E, selenium can also be found in whole grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds as they absorb the mineral from the soil they are grown in. Eating just one Brazil nut daily will provide you with enough vitamin E and selenium.

Beta-carotene is comprised of two molecules of vitamin A and provides the yellow-orange pigment in foods where it can be found. Beta-carotene enters the cell membrane where it lies in wait to fend off free radical attacks. Beta-carotene is found in carrots, yams, sweet potatoes, mangoes, corn, pumpkins and dark green leafy vegetables. The beta-carotene from these foods is more easily absorbed if cooked rather than consumed raw. Ample beta-carotene can be found simply by consuming two large carrots a day.

Lycopene is also a member of the carotenoid family and is the bright red pigment found in certain foods. Ensure you are getting lycopene by eating plenty of tomatoes, watermelon, and pink grapefruit. Like foods containing beta-carotene, cooking foods plentiful in lycopene enables our bodies to better absorb it.

Vitamin E, selenium, beta-carotene, and lycopene all protect your cell membranes. They protect you as a bullet-proof vehicle would protect its occupants from an onslaught of ammunition.

It is always better to obtain your nutrients from whole food or whole food supplements rather than from an isolated nutrient in a pill that was created in a laboratory. Some nutrients, when obtained in this artificial manner, can be harmful. For example, beta-carotene has been found to increase morbidity in current and former smokers when ingested in sufficient quantities in an isolated supplemental form, but is very protective against cancer when consumed in its natural form. Vitamin E and selenium can be toxic if over-ingested. Obtaining your nutrients via food will help to prevent over-absorption as it has been found that the body has the ability to assimilate only what it needs when nutrients are in their natural state. Nature created nutrients in their most perfect form, alongside other nutrients that may aid in their absorption or work symbiotically in other ways, and potentially with other nutrients whose benefits have not even been discovered yet.

Two groups of vegetables deserve a special mention as they contain phytochemicals that are immensely protective of the immune system. They are cruciferous and allium vegetables.

Cruciferous vegetables include broccoli, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, collard greens, kale, cauliflower, bok choy, rutabaga, horseradish, mustard greens, kohlrabi, turnips and their greens, watercress, arugula, and radishes. The sulforaphane in broccoli has been found to aid the liver's ability to excrete carcinogenic substances. This family of vegetables has also been shown to affect the way our body handles hormones by breaking them down into substances that do not promote hormone-dependent cancers. Sulphoraphane's protection has been found to last for days after ingestion.

Allium vegetables include garlic, onions, leeks, chives, shallots, and green onions. Consumption of these foods may speed the elimination of carcinogens and may even prevent the initiation of cancer or its progression.

- *Avoid foods that impair the immune system.*

Foods that are high in fat and cholesterol interfere with your white blood cells' ability to function. This includes primarily meat and dairy products but vegetable oils are no exception. In animal products, the fat can usually be seen as a layer under the skin of the animal or marbled throughout the muscle tissue. However, cholesterol, which only exists in animal products, resides within the cell membranes and are primarily concentrated within the lean portion! So avoid meat and dairy products and added oils to help keep your white blood cells operating at their peak performance.

- *Get adequate sleep.*

Deep, recuperative sleep is needed each night so that your body can focus on repairing the daily wear and tear experienced during the previous day. Making sleep a priority each night will help to ensure that you wake ready to face the challenges of the day with all of your systems functioning optimally.

As a Plant-Based Nutrition Counselor, I provide clients with a summary of research from doctors in the forefront of nutrition research. It is not intended to replace competent medical advice. Notify your physician when making any significant lifestyle change such as the transition to a plant-based lifestyle as the subsequent improvement in your health may decrease your need for certain medications. It is imperative that you do not alter your medication regimen or stop it entirely without the advice of your physician.

*I am a Plant-Based Nutrition Counselor, a graduate of **the only collegiate program in the country** focused on the medical benefits of a plant-based lifestyle from Cornell University, and am board certified by the American Association of Drugless Practitioners. I am also certified by John McDougall, MD to teach his Starch Solution program. I help people to achieve their wellness goals by providing them with the tools that they need to gain control over their health. If you would prefer individualized assistance with your weight, with a chronic, degenerative disease, with other health and wellness aspirations, or if you would like me to speak to a group, please give me a call at 724.469.0693 or email me at traceyeakjn@gmail.com to arrange a time.*

I can personally attest to this lifestyle. The results are nothing short of dramatic. I had been a vegetarian for 20 years when 3 years ago I adopted an entirely plant-based lifestyle. Since that time, I have lost over 50 pounds and have kept it off and resolved an autoimmune condition known as idiopathic thrombocytopenic purpura or ITP. My body was attacking and destroying my platelets. I could have faced the removal of my spleen or platelet transfusions. A low-fat, plant-based lifestyle changed everything for me. My goal is to help as many people as possible to make similar positive changes in their lives.

References

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