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Pg11



ROBIN MEADE

Pg30



MARK RUFFALO

Pg31



LEANE MICHELE

Pg32

YOUR BEST DEFENSE

Keep cold and flu bugs away with immune boosting food and healthy habits

By Teri Wingender

Sometimes the best defense is a good offense. Start now to power up your immune system against the season's viral invaders with help from delicious foods and healthy lifestyle habits. According to nutrition expert Gloria Tsang, RD, founder of HealthCastle.com, "Choosing immune-boosting foods is a cheap, simple strategy for preventing illness that doesn't add any extra work to your busy day." So activate these germ-terminators!

BOOST THE BENEFICIAL BACTERIA:

Your gut is a battlefield – of both good and bad bacteria – and yogurt is on the side of the virtuous. Read labels to ensure you're getting the right types. Says Gloria, "Some strains, like *Lactobacillus casei* and *Lactobacillus reuteri* have been scientifically shown to prevent colds, improve immune response, or shorten sick leaves from work." Enjoy plain, organic low or non-fat yogurt with omega-3-rich ground flax seed and sweetened with fresh or frozen fruit for an extra nutritious treat.

THINK "C": Fresh Vitamin C-rich fruits such as oranges and kiwi are available nearly everywhere throughout flu season, so eat 'em up. And keep frozen organic berries on hand for blending up a C-superlative morning

smoothie. "Only take C supplements if you get early symptoms of the flu," says Gloria.

FAVOR THE FUNGI: All mushrooms – from the ubiquitous white button to exotics such as earthy cremini or the meaty Portobello – are high in beta 1,3/1,6 glucans, which enhance white blood cell activity, critical in warding off infection. Gloria's tip? "Toss extra mushrooms in your pasta sauce, soups, stir-fries, casseroles, or pizza."

SEEK OUT SELENIUM. Fish and seafood, especially tuna, oysters and swordfish are a great source of the mineral selenium, a potent antioxidant. Not a fish lover? Go for chicken, Brazil nuts and whole grains. Notes Gloria, "A small study found that healthy men with a high-selenium diet had an improved immune response."

GET MORE GREEN: Green tea is a nutritional champ – a weight loss buddy, great for gum health, and a powerful antioxidant. Now you can add germ fighter to the lengthy list. Gloria cites a 2007 study showing that participants taking green tea extracts (an amount equivalent to 6 cups per day) had improved immune response. "If you can drink at least 2-3 cups daily, that's great," she says.



ZONE IN ON ZINC: If you've been getting your zinc from a lozenge, "zinc" again. A review of zinc research concludes that zinc lozenges just don't work, advises Gloria. "The best source for zinc, a vital immune booster, is meat," she says.

GO NUTS: Nuts are a rich source of Vitamin E, so add a handful of your favorites to your daily diet. Researchers found that a daily Vitamin E supplement of 200 IU may help prevent colds among the elderly living in nursing homes.

REST DEFENSE: Sleep is critical for keeping your immune system in peak performance. A *Harvard Magazine* report cites the findings of sleep researcher Eve van Cauter of the University of Chicago who exposed sleep deprived students (allowed only four hours of sleep nightly) to flu vaccine. Subjects produced only half the normal level of antibodies in response.

COMMIT TO GET FIT: Studies show that regular exercisers have stronger immune systems than those who don't. Opt for moderate exercise such as walking, swimming or yoga that activates the lymphatic system – your internal cleanup crew. And don't overdo it – more than 90 minutes at a time can actually cause a temporary decrease in the immune system.

