

EATING FOR IMMUNITY

By Laura Fitzgerald

Getting sick is the worst. Nobody puts “getting sick” on their to-do list; in fact, our efforts to avoid the latest 24-hour bug border on obsessive. Gargling with salt water before bed, practically bathing in hand sanitizer, and swabbing every surface in your home or office with antibacterial wipes can help, but when the inevitable belly rumble or coughing fit happens, it hits hard. Suddenly, you’re stacking up piles of tissues while watching “The Price is Right” on your couch, as if Drew Carrey can help. What are you doing wrong? Probably nothing, but you can do a few more things right. Certain foods and drinks have a natural immunity boost.

1. It’s Tea Time – Not all hot teas are created equal though. Chamomile tea is best for fighting off sickness, according to recent research out of London’s Imperial College. Researchers found that frequent chamomile tea drinkers (5 cups a day for 2 weeks) had increased levels of polyphenols or micronutrients, some of which have been associated with increased antibacterial activity. So, drink up and relax—chamomile tea also raises glycine levels, a mild nerve relaxant and sedative. Talk about a bonus!



2. Dressed to the Nines – While choosing a salad over a burger at lunch is definitely a smart choice, drowning that salad in fat-free dressing is not. Your body needs dietary fats to absorb the disease-fighting nutrients in vegetables, such as carotenoids. To help boost your carotenoid absorption, choose dressings with healthy fats from nuts or olive oils. If you’re feeling adventurous, try making your own dressing. For an Italian style, try 2 parts extra virgin olive oil to 1 part balsamic vinegar; for something with an Asian flair, try 3 parts sesame oil to 1 part rice wine vinegar.

3. Whey to Go! – Whey protein is chock-full of an amino acid called cysteine, which converts to glutathione in the body. Glutathione is an antioxidant that helps your cells fight off infections. Whey protein isolate—a purer alternative to

FITNESS FLYER



concentrate— is a great addition to almost any meal, and is very versatile in its powdered form. It can be mixed into smoothies, or baked into muffins and cakes. Fight off colds and eat cookies? Don’t mind if I do!

4. To-may-to, To-mah-to – Moms everywhere swear by slurping chicken noodle soup to get rid of a cold, but to avoid getting sick in the first place, try some tomato. Tomatoes contain lycopene, one of nature’s most powerful antioxidants. Researchers speculate that lycopene helps white blood cells resist the damaging effects of free radicals, which means it can help fight off disease. (Delicious suggestion – serve chicken noodle soup alongside a grilled cheese with sliced tomato for the best of both worlds.)

5. Just Around the Corner – Eating foods from local farms can help boost your immunities simply because locally grown foods are generally fresher than foods shipped to your supermarket from across the country. The fresher the food, the more nutrient-dense they are; the more nutrients you get from your foods, the more weapons you provide your body to help fight off illness. In particular, some research supports the theory that eating local honey may help build immunity to some seasonal allergies. Allergies are triggered by continuous exposure to the same allergen over time. Honey made by bees in the vicinity of an allergenic plant will contain trace amounts of pollen from that plant. In theory, honey can act as a type of vaccine if taken in small amounts for a few months, and provide relief from seasonal pollen-related allergies. Double down and put some in your chamomile tea!

6. Burnin’ Up – Several studies have shown that capsaicin—the active fiery component in chili peppers—can help stop sickness in its tracks. In one study, mice were given a daily dose of capsaicin and had almost triple the amount of antibody-producing cells after 3 weeks than those given no capsaicin. Simply put: The more antibodies, the fewer colds and infections. At the very least, an extra splash of hot sauce in your eggs or your tacos might help you detox. Especially if you’re a mouse!

Just making a few tweaks to your diet, like the ones mentioned above, can mean the difference between making it through flu season unscathed...or not. I wonder how a honey, chili chamomile-tomato smoothie would taste?