

BOOST YOUR IMMUNITY

YOUNG ASIAN FEMALE SITTING ON BEACH MEDITATING © PHOTOLIBRARY.COM

writer **Insiya Rasiwala-Finn**

Yes, it is true that we live in a world where environmental toxins are on the rise, where we are constantly bombarded by too many commitments, a lack of time, over-stimulation and the general stresses of daily life, yet, have you ever wondered why we experience the effects of life on our bodies so differently from one individual to another? Why some of us consistently remain healthy and strong, while others are always depleted and weak? The answer to the puzzle is coded deep in our body's functionality; what author Lorna Vanderhaeghe, who wrote the book *The Immune System Cure*, describes as "the most powerful curing machine hardwired into our body: the immune system."

The problem is that we (most of us) don't think about our immunity much. In fact, we often ignore initial signs of stress on our body. Years of poor nutrition, exposure to environmental toxins, negative thought patterns, or anxiety are all linked to a poor immune system, which in turn can increase your chances of diseases that range from recurrent yeast infections to severe allergies, asthma and chronic fatigue syndrome.

In extreme cases, your immune system, which when healthy, acts in Vanderhaeghe's words as a, "specialised front-line defence that identifies, remembers, attacks and destroys disease-causing invaders and abnormal or infected cells," can turn in on itself and attack your own body's cells and tissues, as in the case of auto immune disorders such as lupus, multiple sclerosis and rheumatoid arthritis. Not a pleasant scenario.

The good news however is that our immune system, like our bodies, is also highly regenerative when we treat it well and with respect. If we can make some simple lifestyle changes, begin to eat better, sleep earlier and exercise moderately, we will start to see results and experience better health. The key is to start now and to realise that we cannot wait for a crisis to occur.

The modern conventional health and pharmaceutical industries have been built on the precepts of treating sickness, not encouraging personal wellness. In ancient China, you only paid your village doctor if you remained healthy, while the emperor's physician was executed if he fell ill. A doctor was incumbent on promoting wellness by preventing illness, not trying to cure those who were ill.

Our world is rather different now. In the USA – which boasts the world's largest pharmaceutical industry – 'big pharma' posted revenues of over US\$315 billion in 2008. Meanwhile the rates of diseases that we can potentially control by simple lifestyle factors, diseases such as Alzheimers, Arthritis and heart disease continue to rise.

Yet our awareness of holistic health globally is growing and even medical research has shown that we can impact our long-term health, age better and experience life optimally by becoming aware of how we can look after ourselves better.

THE ROLE OF IMMUNITY

Think of your immunity as your body's inside-out protection, one that defends the body against disease factors, including climate extremes and assaults of germs, bacteria and viruses, but that begins its work deep within, at a basic cellular level. While our DNA directs cellular activities, our cells carry out our immune functioning. When cells are damaged by free radicals we are more susceptible to disease. Boosting our immune system is key to alleviating and preventing disease, boosting our health and living with vitality. The following are some indispensable tips to boost your immunity.

EAT TO HEAL

Food is probably one of the most healing tools you have to support your immune system. Choose foods that help boost your immunity (such as fresh green, leafy vegetables, high-quality protein and unrefined whole foods,) versus foods that deplete it.

Refined sugar and starches are toxic. With consistent use, sugar disrupts our

body's finely tuned mechanism to regulate our blood sugar levels, putting undue stress on our liver and endocrine system. Consider this statistic, in 1821, the per capita consumption of sugar in the US was 4.5 kilograms per person, per year, today it is about 77kilograms.

If giving up sugar is too challenging for you, see if you can begin to monitor how much sugar you eat in a day and try to decrease it slowly. Try substituting refined sugar with unrefined sugar, raw honey or agave nectar and stay away from artificial sweeteners such as sucralose, aspartame or splenda. Lastly, minimise the amount of caffeine you consume per day. Caffeine leeches your body of minerals and vitamins while also being highly dehydrating. Try substituting fresh mineral water for that second cup of coffee! (See the table on super boosting foods for more information).

GO ORGANIC AND LOCAL

Whether organic foods are tastier, is still up for debate, but it is evident that organic foods are better for the planet, for the people that grow them and for us. Given the increase in environmental toxins – the like of which our ancestors never had to contend with – anything you can do to reduce your exposure to pesticides and chemicals is going to benefit your body and your immunity.

If going all organic is not an option, buy food that is seasonal and local – locally grown vegetables and fruits contain nutrients that will benefit your intestinal flora, helping you with digestion, detoxification and boosting your health and immunity from season to season.



THIS PAGE: YOUNG WOMAN COOKING WHILE LISTENING TO MUSIC ©PHOTOLIBRARY.COM OPPOSITE PAGE: WOMEN LAYING ON BEACH ©PHOTOLIBRARY.COM; HEALTHY DIET; AND FRIENDS ON ROLLERBLADES ON PARK ©PHOTOLIBRARY.COM

STOCK UP ON ANTIOXIDANTS

Antioxidants are essential for proper functioning of the immune system because they are the compounds that protect cells and tissues from damaging interactions with free radicals (unstable atoms). Essentially they act as free radical ‘scavengers’ that promote immunity, so if there are more free radical cells than antioxidants, immunity function will suffer.

The best way to get your antioxidants is to eat a well-balanced diet with lots of unrefined, whole grains, organic, range-fed meats, organic fruits and vegetables and unrefined oils such as olive and good quality cream and butterfat. Try to pick foods that run a gamut of colours, like red peppers or green lettuce and yellow tomatoes and remember that if you are a vegetarian or vegan, you may have to supplement your diet with key antioxidants such as vitamin A. Keep in mind, the benefit of eating whole fruits, vegetables, and whole grain foods, in contrast to antioxidant supplements, is that they contain a variety of natural defence enzymes.

GET SOME OPCs

A highly potent nutrient, OPCs or oligomeric proanthocyanidins, are powerful bioflavonoids that are often used as a natural

food supplement. Derived from from one or more of a combination of grapeseed extract, red wine extract and/or pine bark extract, OPCs are 20 times more powerful than vitamin C and 50 times more powerful than vitamin E. Utilised in Europe for two decades, OPCs have powerful free radical scavenging activity and hence they are potent antioxidants. Registered holistic nutritionist Judy Chambers in Vancouver, Canada; never travels without her trusty bottle of grapeseed extract, a rich source of OPCs. “I add a few drops to my bottle of water in the airplane – perfect for combating the recycled plane air; and keeping your immune system up. It is also great to have as an additive for water, in any place where you may not be 100 percent sure of the quality of water and to protect your immune system in new environments.”

SAY HELLO TO MR. SUNSHINE

Recent studies increasingly point to vitamin D as being an essential nutrient for our wellbeing and one of the immune system’s strongest allies against disease. It is essential for strong bones, healthy teeth and normal growth.

One of the easiest sources of vitamin D is the sun – our bodies are stimulated to make vitamin D when ultraviolet rays from the sun reach our skin. The amount of

super immune boosting foods

with contributions from Judy Chambers, Holistic Nutritionist
(www.dynamichynature.com)

- 1. Chlorophyll-rich Green Foods:** leafy greens (nettles), sprouts (broccoli sprouts), micro-algae (spirulina, chlorella), cereal grasses (wheatgrass, barley grass) and seaweeds (kelp, kombu, dulse) and unrefined sea salt. Enough said, add fresh greens to a fruit smoothie, cook up a delicious stir-fry and add some seaweed, just be sure to get your daily dose of greens.
- 2. Live Cultured Foods and Beverages:** naturally fermented unpasteurized sauerkraut, vinegar or kombucha beverage. Live cultured, fermented foods not only preserve nutrients, they also break them down into easily digestible forms. A good example is soybeans. Fermentation breaks down the complex soybean protein into digestible amino acids, giving us traditional Asian foods such as miso, tempeh and tamari. Kimchi is also a great example of a traditional fermented food.
- 3. Ancient Super Fruits:** elderberry, camu, acai, gooseberry, goji berries. Goji berries are a staple in Asian foods where they are often cooked which makes them more digestible and absorbable into our bloodstream. Ancient super fruits are high in vitamin C and bioflavonoids. They also contain valuable dietary fibre.
- 4. Omega-3 Super Seeds:** sprouted chia. A super food, the mild-tasting chia seeds can be eaten raw or sprouted. They help with protein assimilation and hydration and are a useful source of concentrated energy. The perfect food to take on a hike. Try sprinkling chia seeds onto smoothies, cereal and even in soups.
- 5. Wild Cold-water Fish:** sardines packed in water or olive oil and Antarctic Krill. These omega-3 oil rich fish are some of the few foods containing Coenzyme Q10 (CoQ10), a nutrient found in the body’s cells that is known to help with cardiovascular disease.
- 6. Homemade wild animal stocks:** made from chicken, fish or wild game. Use meats that are free-range / pasture fed and antibiotic free. Simmer bones in water and add some apple cider vinegar to maximize mineral composition. Grass-fed beef is rich in omega-3 anti-inflammatory fatty acids (the healthy fat found in salmon), in conjugated linoleic acid (CLA), a proven cancer fighter and lean muscle-building tool, as well as key antioxidants vitamins A and E.
- 7. Wild-crafted Herbs and Spices:** turmeric, ginger, rosemary, oregano, garlic. Antibacterial and immune strengthening, these herbs and spices are your natural medicine cabinet.
- 8. Organic lemon squeezed into warm water:** great for balancing the acidity and alkalinity in your body, an ancient superfood.

In ancient China, you only paid your village doctor if you remained healthy, while the emperor's physician was executed if he fell ill.

direct sunlight that we do, or don't receive depends on a multitude of variables: the season, our geographic latitude, the amount of time we spend in the sun and our skin pigment or tone (those of us with darker skin tones need more time in the sun, than those with pale skin).

The recommended amount of sun-time is anywhere from five to 30 minutes, twice a week without sunscreen – a far cry from our popular mania for sun protection. Eggs, wild salmon, milk and whole breakfast cereals are also fortified with vitamin D.

DREAM SWEETLY

Whether you need six hours or 10 at night, be sure to get the amount of sleep you need. Sleep balances our hormone levels – moderating both human growth hormone and cortisol the stress hormone. With a good nights sleep, you are more likely to think clearly, maintain a healthy weight and enjoy clear, healthy skin.

free radicals

Free radicals are single atoms or molecules with an unpaired electron (there are usually two). These compounds are chemically reactive and are likened to 'marauders' in the body, attacking cell membranes and red blood cells. They also cause damage in the DNA/RNA strands which can trigger mutations in tissue, blood vessels and skin, linked with human diseases such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, Alzheimer's disease and Parkinson's disease. Superficially, free radical damage to our skin causes premature ageing and wrinkling. At the level of the organs it can set the stage for tumours, while its impact on the blood vessels can cause build up of plaque. Causes for free radical damage include environmental pollution, additives in processed foods, excessive alcohol, smoking, burns, infection, stress, radiation and nutrient deficiencies. Over-consumption of poly-unsaturated, refined oils such as soy, canola, safflower and corn have also been linked to free radical damage.

EXERCISE MODERATELY AND CONSISTENTLY

To live longer and be healthier, it appears that intense exercise may not be necessary – in fact it may actually suppress your immune system and make you more susceptible to colds and viruses. However, as Dr. Mehmet Oz points out in his bestselling book, *You, the Owner's Manual* moderate, daily exercise, i.e. a 30-minute slow jog, or a fast walk can aid with joint longevity and body immunity more effectively than sprinting.

PRACTICE MEDITATION, BREATHING OR YOGA TO DE-STRESS

Canada and Bali-based yoga instructor Eoin Finn, says that stress directly impacts our emotions, which suppresses our immune system. A simple breathing exercise can help relieve stress. The effects of yoga and meditation on stress are well-known. If you can create a mindful practice for yourself for even 10 minutes a day, you will experience not only less stress and negativity but also more ease and vitality.

GET OUTSIDE AND BREATHE FRESH AIR

Negative ions are replete in natural surroundings, which also inhibit the spread of free radicals in our bodies. Getting outside for a walk during your lunch break or before and after work is a great way to connect with nature be it in a wild or an urban setting. Just remember to breathe in some fresh air.

CELEBRATE 'ME' TIME

We don't make enough time for ourselves in our busy, full lives. Think about this time as a rebooting of your mental and emotional software. Take a bath if you like baths, try journalling or listen to your favourite music, it does not have to be long, but allow yourself to feel cared for and loved and know that it will positively impact your overall health. 🌿

