



PROTECT *your* HEALTH!

FIVE WAYS TO BUILD A STRONG IMMUNE SYSTEM



Do you get sick often and take sick days off from work? Chances are, you have a weak immune system. The immune system is designed to defend against illness and infections. But our lifestyle choices make it impossible for the immune system to do its job properly. One of the primary ways we weaken our immune systems is by eating a poor diet. The good news is, this can be reversed in short order. By avoiding the bad foods and embracing the good ones, you can boost your immune system in no time!

AVOID SUGAR

Sugar is arguably the worst food for your health. Unfortunately, Americans are drowning in it! We consume an astounding 32 teaspoons of sugar every day! That's two-thirds of a cup of sugar every day! That's more than four times a safe amount, according to the American Heart Association. Most of us know by now that too much sugar leads to weight gain and diabetes. But you may not know that that sugar severely weakens the immune system.

Scientists found that within five hours of consuming 21 teaspoons of sugar, our white blood cells, which fight our body's foreign invaders, lose a whopping 40 percent of their ability to kill bacteria.

Dr. Michael Roizen is the Chief Wellness Officer of the Wellness Institute at Cleveland Clinic and the author of several best-selling health books, such as *The RealAge Diet: Make Yourself Younger with What You Eat*. He says sugar is the favorite fuel for a lot of things we don't want.

"We think sugar helps the bacteria, helps the virus, helps, in fact, the cancer cells grow faster," he says. "So it does all the things to make the viruses and bacteria prosper, which makes it harder for you to kill them all. It's a numbers game and a speed game."

Unfortunately, sugar is in far too many foods. Sometimes it's an obvious ingredient, such as in soda. However, sugar is often hidden in foods that we don't normally consider sweet, such as bread, pasta sauce, and yogurt.

There are over 40 different kinds of sugars. High fructose corn syrup is a form of sugar, and is added to thousands of products we buy at the grocery store. Dr. Roizen advises consumers to check the list of ingredients on a food product's package to determine whether that item contains sugar.

DIET

“Maltose, dextrose, fructose, etc... anything that ends in an ‘ose,’ that’s sugar.” Dr. Roizen explains. “Anything that has the word, ‘syrup’ in it, honey is a sugar. Maltodextrin, evaporated cane juice, beet sugar, corn sweetener, anything that says, ‘sweetener’ on it.”

Many foods that seem healthy are in fact loaded with sugar, such as fruit juice and sports drinks.

AVOID PROCESSED FOODS

In addition to sugar, processed foods also weaken your immune system. Processed foods are foods that are not in their natural state, such as cookies, crackers, snack foods, frozen meals, packaged foods and most fast-foods. The majority of processed foods contain either trans fats or omega-6 fats, which cause unhealthy inflammation. Simply put, inflammation means your body is too busy repairing itself to properly fight against foreign invaders.

Dr. Roizen says inflammation constantly occupies your immune system rendering it ineffective in battling everything that it should.

“Inflammation makes you vulnerable to attacks someplace else,” he explains, “so let’s say you have inflammation in your knee. Well, all your white cells are running down there to fight the inflammation. There’s nobody left to fight the cold and flu entering.”

HOW TO SPOT TRANS FATS

Now that you know trans fats cause damaging inflammation, you’ll want to know how to avoid them. Look on a food product’s list of ingredients. Instead of looking for the words, “trans fat,” look for the word “hydrogenated.” Trans fats are also known as “hydrogenated” oils. This is because they are manufactured by infusing hydrogen into an oil (in order to prolong a product’s shelf life).

Beware: even if a product’s package touts “No Trans Fats” it might not be true! That’s because of a marketing loophole. Food manufacturers are allowed to say a product has no trans fats as long as the amount of trans fats is less than a half of a gram per serving. It’s up to the food manufacturers to declare a product’s serving size. Therefore, food manufacturers often declare a serving size as incredibly small, such as two cookies. Then they put as much trans fats into those two cookies to still allow them to be legally declared “trans fat free.” However, what ends up happening, is the average person eats far more than just one serving, therefore, ingests far too much trans fat (actually *any* trans fat is too much).

The bottom line is, don’t rely on the advertising on a product’s packaging. Instead, look at the list of ingredients. In addition to many processed foods, shortening and margarine are also trans fats.

HOW TO SPOT OMEGA-6 FATS

Omega-6 fats are not inherently healthy. What makes them dangerous is the amount we consume. Omega-6 fats, such as vegetable oil, soybean oil, and corn oil are good

Fact Resources

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Dr. Roizen practices internal medicine and coaches patients to, and to sustain, wellness in the department of Preventive Medicine. The Wellness Institute that he chairs aims to elevate preventive care and wellness as a core brand of Cleveland Clinic and a core value taught to patients, and to employees, and spread to all other communities the clinic touches.

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for us as long as they are consumed in approximately equal amounts as omega-3 oils, like fish oil. The problem is, most Americans consume 20 times more omega-6 oils than omega-3s, and that imbalance creates massive inflammation.

The reason most Americans consume so many omega-6 oils is that they are a staple of processed foods. In fact, it's estimated that most Americans consume soybean oil every single day! Just like when you're looking for trans fats, look on the list of ingredients for omega-6 fats such as soybean oil, corn oil, vegetable oil, cottonseed oil, and safflower oil.

"You get more spread of the virus and bacteria if you have a lot of trans fats," declares Dr. Roizen. "Those are in processed foods, and the same thing goes with omega-6s."

AVOID FOOD PACKAGING

Sometimes it's not just packaged food that causes problems. The packaging itself often contains chemicals that have been shown to weaken your body's immune function. For example, microwavable popcorn bags are commonly coated in nonstick chemicals called perfluorinated compounds (PFCs) so grease doesn't penetrate the bag. A recent study found levels the government considers "safe" are 100 to 1,000 times too high for children. These chemicals have been shown to mess up your immune system; vaccines given to people with higher levels of PFCs in their bodies were much less effective.

POPCORN THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY

Instead of buying microwave popcorn, purchase the raw kernels and make in a pan on the stove. Pour avocado oil into the pan to cover the bottom. Pour enough kernels into the pan to cover the bottom in one layer. Put a lid on the pot and cook on medium-high heat until you hear the first kernel pop. Then shake the pot occasionally until popping slows to one pop every two seconds.

DO-IT-YOURSELF HEALTHY MICROWAVE POPCORN OPTIONS

1. Put $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of unpopped popcorn kernels into a clean brown paper lunch sack, fold the top over a few times, and stand it in the center of the microwave oven. Microwave on high until the popping slows to about one pop every two seconds. Remove from the bag and eat.
2. Pour popcorn into a glass bowl. Stir in two tablespoons of melted butter and some salt. Loosely cover the bowl with a glass lid or towel. Microwave on high until the popping slows to about one pop every two seconds. Remove and eat.

REPLACE NONSTICK POTS AND PANS

Some of the same nonstick chemicals added to popcorn bags are also used to coat nonstick pots and pans. When you start noticing scratches on these pans, replace them with enamel, glass, cast iron, or stainless steel, which are not coated with nonstick chemicals.

PLASTICS/CANS

The chemicals used to make plastic have been shown to have negative health effects such as endocrine disruption, which can lead to immune system suppressions. Therefore, avoid purchasing food in plastic containers and opt for food in glass or metal containers instead. Furthermore, avoid heating food in plastic

containers, or storing foods in plastic containers or plastic wrap. Many companies also use cans, such as the kinds containing soup, with bisphenol-A (BPA) in the lining. This is a form of plastic that has been shown to interfere with the immune system. A better alternative to processed soup in a can is homemade.

EASY HOMEMADE CHICKEN SOUP

1. Place a 4-pound chicken in a pot. Cut 3 of the carrots and 2 celery stalks into 1-inch pieces. Quarter an onion. Add the cut vegetables to the pot with the 2 teaspoons salt, 1 teaspoon pepper, and enough cold water to cover (about 8 cups). Bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer, skimming any foam that rises to the top, until the chicken is cooked through, about 30 minutes.
2. Transfer the chicken to a bowl and let cool. Strain the broth, discarding the vegetables. Return the broth to the pot. Thinly slice the 3 carrots and 2 celery stalks. Add them to the broth and simmer until tender, about 10 minutes. When the chicken is cool enough to handle, shred the meat and add it to the soup.

According to Dr. Roizen, a simple way to improve your immune system is to shop the perimeter of the grocery store, not the middle aisles.

“One of the easiest ways to decide you’re eating healthy is to avoid food in a package that isn’t in its original form. So packaged food is really bad for your health, bad for inflammation,” he says.

DRINK LOTS OF WATER

Another obstacle to a healthy immune system is dehydration. The fact is, we don’t drink enough water. Fluids flush out damaging toxins, and at the same time carry nutrients to the infection site. To check whether you’re drinking enough water, look at your urine. It should be pale yellow. If it’s dark yellow, you need to drink more.

Speaking of drinking, while water is good, alcohol is bad for the immune system. Research shows drinking too much alcohol reduces the ability of white blood cells to kill germs. The more alcohol we consume, the more infections we get.

FOODS THAT BOOST YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM

Now that you know what to avoid, Dr. Roizen lists the foods that boost the immune system.

“The most important thing that feeds our defense system is in fact food, and food choices,” he points out. “So what food you have is key to whether you have a prolonged illness and whether you get sick at all. I’m going to say for me, the best super-food is a variety of cruciferous vegetables.”

A study in older adults showed that eating more fruits and vegetables improved their ability to fight illness. Foods especially high in immune-boosting phytochemicals are berries, kale, beets, broccoli, onions, garlic, shiitake mushroom and red bell peppers. Watercress is the newest super-food. It’s loaded with even more vitamins and minerals than spinach.

EAT PROBIOTICS

Fermented foods, such as pickles, sauerkraut and plain yogurt are called probiotics because they contain healthy bacteria necessary for our immune systems to function properly. Probiotics replace the good bacteria that antibiotics, antibacterial soaps and a poor diet deplete from our bodies. As a bonus, Dr. Roizen says fermented foods can even help us lose weight.

“In mice,” he says. “There are studies where twins, the ones with the good bacteria stay thin. The ones with the bad bacteria get fat, and by giving the thin mice’s bacteria to the (fat) mice, they get thin.”

EAT KIMCHI

Dr. Roizen says, hands-down, the fermented food that packs the greatest punch is kimchi.

It’s a Korean vegetable fermentation,” he explains, “so they take varieties of vegetables, cabbage, broccoli, every vegetable they can have, onion, and then they ferment it with this mixture. It tastes great and it gives you great bacteria.”

HOW TO EAT KIMCHI

Kimchi is often found in most grocery stores in the produce department or with the Asian foods. It’s most often eaten with a bowl of rice but is also delicious in many other forms such as:

- Stir-fried in avocado oil, adding diced port and water, cooking until the meat is tender, adding tofu then serving with rice
- As a salad drizzled with sesame oil and rice vinegar
- Sauteed until it develops a caramelized finish, then scrambled with eggs

So fight colds and flu with a healthy diet: one free of sugar and processed foods, but rich in whole foods and plenty of water. You’ll feel better from the inside out!

Note: Before beginning any new health regimen, it is important to consult your family physician or health care professional first. The information given in this publication is for your consideration. It is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease. Before starting or stopping any exercise routine or nutritional supplementation, please consult your family physician or health care professional about any contraindications that would make doing so inadvisable. This information is not intended as a substitute for the medical advice of physicians. The reader should regularly consult a physician in matters relating to his/ her health and particularly with respect to any symptoms that may require diagnosis or medical attention.