**Easy, Natural Ways to Boost Your Immune System**

The cool breezes of fall bring more than pumpkin spiced treats – they bring the dreaded cold and flu season, too! There’s a reason why you hear more sneezing around the office once the temperature drops. [Research](http://www.businessinsider.com/why-you-get-sick-in-winter-2015-10) shows that you are more likely to get sick during the colder seasons, and illnesses tend to last longer and have more severe symptoms as well.

One main reason for the spike in illnesses during the fall and winter is weaker immune systems. [Researchers](http://blog.delimmune.com/2016/12/does-cold-weather-weaken-immune-system/) from Yale University found that immune systems slow down during the colder seasons – decreasing your body’s ability to attack and fight off harmful germs, viruses, and bacteria.

The good news is there are many ways to promote a healthy, powerful immune system. So, if you don’t feel like sniffling and coughing all season, here are nine easy, natural ways to boost your immune system:

**Limit alcohol.** Excessive consumption of alcohol can harm the immune system and increase your susceptibility of catching illnesses. [Studies](https://www.askdrsears.com/topics/feeding-eating/family-nutrition/foods-to-boost-immunity/4-habits-weaken-immune-system) have shown that one drink doesn’t have any harmful effects on the immune system. Three or more drinks, however, will suppress the ability of your white blood cells to fight off germs.

**Add mushrooms to your diet.** Certain mushrooms – such as enoki, maitake, and shiitake – have significant anticancer and immune-boosting effects on the body. Mushrooms contain compounds that can help fight inflammation, prevent [premature aging](https://info.totalwellnesshealth.com/blog/6-everyday-habits-that-are-secretly-aging-you), and help regenerate nerve cells. Check out this [ultimate immune-boosting mushroom soup](https://www.thehealthymaven.com/2016/01/the-ultimate-immune-boosting-soup.html)!

**Meditate.** Believe it or not, taking some time to relax and meditate will do wonders for your immune system. Mindfulness meditation stimulates a region in your brain responsible for immune system functions. [Research](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12883106) shows that meditation also boosts antibodies. Start meditating for 10 minutes a day to benefit from its immune-boosting powers.

**Stop smoking.** Tobacco products damage every part of your body, including your immune system. Smoking cigarettes weakens your body’s defense against germs, infections, and illnesses. Smokers have a higher risk of respiratory infections, more frequent and prolonged illnesses, and fewer antioxidants in their body.

**Drink more water.** We all know how important it is to stay adequately hydrated, yet many of us still aren’t drinking enough water throughout the day. [Drinking enough water](https://info.totalwellnesshealth.com/blog/bid/352579/6-Ways-to-Increase-Water-Consumption-In-Your-Office) helps all of your body’s systems function properly, including your immune system. Talk to a health professional to determine how much water you should be consuming in a day (as it varies individually) and start tracking your water intake!

**Sleep.** Getting enough sleep is so important. Without enough [quality sleep](https://info.totalwellnesshealth.com/blog/heres-how-to-get-a-perfect-nights-sleep), your immune system won’t function properly. Lack of sleep also makes it difficult to recover from any illness, meaning symptoms will linger and be more severe. Be sure to get at least eight hours of sleep every night.

**Limit sugar.** According to [Ask Dr. Sears](https://www.askdrsears.com/topics/feeding-eating/family-nutrition/foods-to-boost-immunity/4-habits-weaken-immune-system), eating or drinking 100 grams (8 tbsp.) of sugar, the equivalent of about two cans of soda, can reduce the ability of white blood cells to kill germs by 40%. Try to focus on eating natural foods that don’t contain hidden sugars, and reach for [one of these snacks](http://info.totalwellnesshealth.com/blog/put-down-that-candy-bar-here-are-8-healthy-foods-to-eat-when-your-sugar-craving-kicks-in) when your sugar craving kicks in. Check out this [article](https://greatist.com/eat/sugar-free-dinner-recipes) for some delicious dinner ideas with no added sugar!

**Eat more garlic.** According to an [article](http://www.chatelaine.com/health/diet/five-health-reasons-to-eat-more-garlic-and-an-immune-boosting-caesar-salad-recipe/) by Julie Daniluk, R.H.N., garlic has the ability to boost your immune system by increasing the rate at which your natural killer cells are made. As a bonus, eating more garlic can help regulate blood sugar, reduce cholesterol, and lower your blood pressure. Check out [10 ways to eat garlic every day](https://www.plantoeat.com/blog/2012/10/ten-ways-to-eat-raw-garlic-every-day/) to sneak some garlic into your diet.

**Stay optimistic.** Happiness is key! Maintaining a positive mindset and [being optimistic](https://info.totalwellnesshealth.com/blog/7-daily-habits-that-will-turn-you-into-an-optimist) has been linked to a stronger immune system. A [research study](https://www.livescience.com/8158-optimism-boosts-immune-system.html) showed that when a group of students became more optimistic, they had stronger cell-mediated immunity – the flood of immune cells that respond to an invasion of foreign viruses or bacteria.

Besides a [flu shot](http://info.totalwellnesshealth.com/blog/having-doubts-about-getting-this-years-flu-shot-heres-why-you-shouldnt), your immune system is your best defense against getting sick during the fall and winter months. Help your body win the fight against germs by practicing a healthy lifestyle. A stronger immune system = a healthier, happier you.