**How to Support your immune system**

Healthy eating and lifestyle play an important role in strengthening and supporting our immune system. Whilst there is no food or supplement that will prevent catching any virus, evidence suggests that it is surely beneficial to improve our immune system to influence the duration of illness and even reduce its severity. It is also worth noting that good hygiene practice remains the best means of avoiding infection.

***Healthy Eating***

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**Focus on whole foods:** Whole foods are plant-based foods that are an important source of fiber and phytonutrients. Whole foods include whole grains, nuts, seeds, legumes, fruits and vegetables. Dietary fiber is the non-digestible form of carbohydrate which is not digested by your body hence keeps you feeling fuller for longer. Clinical studies suggest fiber provides a wide range of benefits in areas such as gut health, weight management and blood glucose control. 70% of your immune cells reside in your gut so keeping your gut healthy will support your immune system as well.

**Fruits and Vegetables:** Phytonutrients are plant-based compounds found in coloured fruits and vegetables with a wide range of antioxidant and anti-inflammatory health benefits. A **minimum** of 5 to 9 servings of fruits and vegetables should be consumed per day. You can have fresh, frozen or canned (without syrup). Try to have a variety and different colours of fruits and vegetables every day.

**Adequate quality protein:** Protein is considered to be the building block of life which is necessary for muscle growth, bone health, cell repair and growth and tissue repair. Protein helps to promote satiety and keep blood sugar and insulin levels stable. Try to have a source of protein at each mealtime such as meat, fish, eggs, lentils, legumes, tofu, cheese.

**Good quality fats**: Fat is an essential component of a balanced healthy diet. Opt for good quality fats such as avocado, nuts, seeds, extra virgin olive oil and decrease the intake of saturated fats and trans fats (typically found in processed foods).

**Home cooked foods**: Try to have fresh home cooked foods and avoid any highly processed foods. Here are some top tips for how you can make it easier to cook at home.

- Use fresh, frozen or tinned ingredients

- You can cook in large batches and freeze them

- Plan in advance and source the ingredients accordingly

- Cook simple recipes such as grilling vegetables with a source of protein such as fish/chicken/tofu

- Experiment with the ingredients so you don’t get bored of eating the same food

- Add more colours and flavours by using different herbs, coloured vegetables, lentils to your meals to get varied nutrients

- Cooking can help relieve stress

- Avoid any processed foods like takeaways

- Restrict intake of high sugar foods and drinks

**Probiotics and Prebiotics**

**Probiotics are live bacteria often described as "good" bacteria that helps** to keep your gut bacteria healthy and balanced. Some of the most common types of probiotics include:

* Bifidobacterium
* Lactobacillus
* Saccharomyces boulardii, which is a type of yeast

You can easily get probiotics from food sources such as live yoghurt, kefir, non-dairy yogurts, fresh pickles, miso, fermented foods such as kimchi, kombucha tea, sauerkraut.



Some examples of how to Include them in your diet;

- breakfast of live yogurt with berries, flax seeds, and nuts.

- Miso soup

- Drinking probiotic-rich beverages, such as kefir or kombucha

- Serving sauerkraut of kimchi as a side dish to main meals.

**Prebiotics** are the fiber-rich foods that the human body cannot digest and only probiotics feed and grow on. These foods help to increase the number and activity of healthy microbes in your gut. Sources of prebiotic foods include legumes, leeks, garlic, onion, asparagus, banana, artichoke, chicory.

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***Evidence suggests that probiotics enhance the innate immunity (individual’s first line of defence) and prebiotics support the overall immune system. Adding probiotic and prebiotic rich foods to your diet will keep your gut microbiome healthy. Since majority of your immune cells reside in your gut, so if you keep your gut healthy, then your immune system will be well supported.***

***Healthy Lifestyle***

#### **Exercise:** Engaging in physical activity regularly is an important pillar of healthy living, It has many health benefits such as improving cardiovascular health, maintaining body weight, managing stress, lowering blood pressure, maintaining bone health and reducing the risk of many diseases such as type 2 diabetes, osteoarthritis and obesity.

#### In a recent article published in International journal Exercise Immunology Review, the leading experts explained that “regular, daily exercise will help maintain the way the immune system works -- not suppress it and rather regular exercise will have a tremendously positive effect on our health and wellbeing, both today and for the future."

Make exercise a part of your daily routine and enjoy its benefits. Try any physical activity of your choice such as:



* Endurance: jogging, running, cycling, dancing, swimming, biking
* Strength training: free weights, resistance band, your own body weight
* Flexibility: yoga, Pilates, tai chi

How to incorporate exercise in your daily routine?

1. Start with few minutes of daily physical activity.

2. Schedule your workout at the same time everyday when your energy is at the highest such as first thing in the morning or evening before dinner.

3. Focus on activities you enjoy such as walking, running, dancing, yoga, gardening or playing with your kids.

4. Wear suitable and comfortable clothing.

5. Make exercise a social activity- in the current situation you can even do it together with your friends online by using apps such as zoom, Skype.

**Stress:** Chronic stress has shown to suppress the immune responses therefore it is important to reduce stress levels to promote healthy living and healing. Stress also reduces your bodies anti-inflammatory responses due to high levels of cortisol.

#### While it is not possible to avoid all the sources of stress in our lives, we can surely try to manage stress by using techniques such as meditation, practicing gratitude, yoga and deep breathing.

#### /var/folders/2j/yww9_1w90s1g_p2wjw5zwb_40000gn/T/com.microsoft.Word/Content.MSO/F6985253.tmpThings you can do to manage stress:

#### 1. Talk about your feelings with any family member or friends

#### 2. Get professional help if needed

#### 3. Exercise daily to release feel good hormone, endorphins

#### 4. Set aside some ‘me time’ where you spend time doing something that you enjoy

#### 5. Try some relaxation techniques such as calming breathing exercises, meditation or yoga

#### 6. Delegate some of the non-urgent work to other family members or get help from outside

**Sleep:** Sleep plays a vital role in maintaining physical and mental health. Getting enough quality sleep at the right time can reduce the risk of many serious conditions. Make sure to get atleast 7-8 hours of sleep every night. If you wake up tired then it’s highly likely that you are not getting enough quality sleep.

Ongoing sleep deficiency is linked to an increased risk of medical conditions such as heart disease, obesity, high blood pressure and diabetes. Ongoing sleep deficiency may even disrupt your immune system so you are not able to fight off infections well and many affect your mental health and cause mental health issues such as brain fog, anxiety, depression, difficulty to concentrate and make decisions.

Some tips for a restful night

* Keep regular sleep hours
* Make sure your bedroom is quite and dark
* Exercise regularly to regulate your sleep cycles
* Cut down on caffeine since it has shown to prevent deep sleep
* Do not indulge in too much alcohol before bed since this can interrupt your sleep patterns
* Try to practice relaxation techniques such as deep breathing or meditation before bedtim