

BOOST YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM

During this pandemic, many of us feel helpless as we watch the numbers climb and worry that we're going to get sick.

And while you can't control everything in life, there are some things that *are* within your control.

To combat fear and that hopeless feeling, take action on what you can. Here are 8 tips to help you boost your immune system, and decrease the chances that you'll get sick (or recover more quickly):

1. Exercise. Moderate exercise of only 30 minutes a day increases several factors in the immune system. The most important of these is your leukocyte count. These are the cells that fight infection.

** Sitting at a desk all day increases the odds of catching common ailments. Get outside (while staying away from others) and take a brisk walk every day.*

2. Eat nutritious food...slowly. When you eat in a rushed, frenzied, or distracted manner (chomping a salad at lightning speed while scrolling on your phone), your food doesn't taste as good, and your digestion and metabolism don't function optimally.

** To get the maximum nutritional benefits from each meal, savor your food slowly and chew each mouthful several times.*

3. Reduce sugar. Excess sugar consumption has a negative effect on the immune system's effectiveness. This effect can be seen after the consumption of as little as 75 grams of sugar and continues for at least a few hours.

** On the other hand, foods that are high in antioxidants and other nutrients boost the immune system. The best way to get all of these nutrients is by eating fruits and vegetables. Ideally, fill at least half your plate with vegetables.*

4. Reduce stress. We're all faced with a certain amount of stress in our lives--especially during uncertain times like now. A small amount of stress is actually good for our health. However, excessive, chronic stress has a very negative impact on immune system health.

** Have you ever noticed you only get sick when you're overstressed? When you're stressed, you become much more likely to develop a variety of illnesses. To bring cortisol levels down, create tiny moments of joy in your day. Little things like a cup of tea, a good book, or listening to your favorite song. A practice of gratitude is another technique that has been shown to improve health and longevity.*

5. Laugh. Laughing is great for you. It decreases the level of stress hormones in your body. It also increases a specific type of white blood cell. Even the anticipation of experiencing something humorous has a very positive effect on the immune system.

** Watch a comedy, laugh with friends on a virtual call, or even indulge in a few silly cat videos online. Joy is like "medicine" that increases your body's dopamine and oxytocin levels while reducing cortisol.*

6. Get high-quality sleep. Most adults require 7 to 9 hours of sleep to maintain good health. A lack of sleep can increase the likelihood of getting sick. When you're well-rested, you're better equipped to fight off diseases. Tip for better sleep: make your bedroom a tech-free zone. No phone, tablet, or any digital devices. Devices mess with your circadian rhythm and make it harder to get high quality rest.

** Insomnia can increase inflammation in the body, which inhibits your immune system's responsiveness.*

7. Practice relaxation techniques. Since chronic stress decreases immune system function, learning relaxation techniques will help return your immune system to healthy state.

** Experiments have shown that regular meditation has a positive impact on your immune system. Take a timeout for silence, stillness, and deep breathing. Even just a couple of slow, deep, full breaths can lower your cortisol (stress hormone) levels and significantly shift how you feel.*

8. Think High Quality Thoughts.

Research confirms that "a positive attitude can improve your immune system and may help you live longer." [Source]

A stronger body begins in your mind. Choose high quality thoughts that promote a calm, focused, optimistic, and capable mood: I can handle this. I am supported. I have options. I have many blessings. I am strong. I can take the next step.

