

Boost Your Immune System

Staying healthy, especially at this time of year, is a major priority for my family and me, and I'm sure it is for you, too. We're all more susceptible to catching a cold or the flu in the winter since we're spending more time in dry indoor environments, where we have more exposure to other people's germs, and our protective mucous membranes are weakened. The holidays can also increase our stress levels and interfere with our sleep, which leaves us even more vulnerable to illnesses. Of course, our eating habits can also suffer during the winter months, especially during the holidays when nutritious foods tend to be replaced by more "special occasion" foods. A less-than-optimal diet can lead to nutrient deficiencies, which in turn significantly weakens our immunity to illnesses, like colds and the flu.

Maintaining your healthful diet, exercising regularly and getting enough sleep throughout the year help to keep your health on track. However, there are some specific strategies that you may want to incorporate right now to give your immune system a little boost in defending itself against winter bugs. Keep in mind that there is no "magic bullet" and you really need a variety of nutritious foods to keep your immune system functioning optimally to both help prevent colds and flus and speed recovery if you do get sick. Although I always encourage you to eat food, not nutrients, there are a few specific nutrients that are found in certain foods that may help give your immune system the extra boost it needs to combat those winter stressors. In fact, nutrients all work synergistically to keep us healthy, so eating a variety of nutritious foods is a safer and more proactive approach than taking vitamin supplements in most cases. In addition to a well-balanced diet, there are a few lifestyle measures you can



take to help protect yourself from germs, as well.

✓ **Antioxidants**, specifically vitamins A, C and E, are a key line of defense against immune system invaders. Found mainly in orange, green and red fruits and vegetables, as well as nuts and plant oils, these nutrients keep our skin and mucous membranes healthy so they can block any germs that try to enter our bodies. They also help repair cells inside the body. Top food sources include carrots and orange-fleshed sweet potatoes for vitamin A and carotenoids; red bell peppers, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, kale, cantaloupe, citrus fruits, strawberries and kiwi for vitamin C; and nuts, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, avocado, olives and olive oil for vitamin E.

✓ **Vitamin D** plays an important role in immune system function; there is some

evidence that people with the lowest levels of vitamin D are more likely to catch a cold. The best sources of vitamin D are sunlight and supplements. Egg yolks, salmon, sardines, tuna and fortified mushrooms, milk and cereal also contain some vitamin D, but it is very difficult to get adequate vitamin D through diet alone. Since it is almost impossible to get enough sun in the winter, even in Southern California, you may want to consider a daily vitamin D3 supplement. The best way to determine your optimal dose is to have your physician test your blood levels and recommend a supplemental dose based on your current level.

✓ **Zinc, iron, and selenium** are all immune-boosting minerals found together in egg yolks, whole grains, lentils, chicken, turkey, beef, fish and seafood. They work together to help produce white blood cells and other immune-protecting cells. Our bodies only need small amounts of these nutrients (that's why they're called trace minerals), so don't think that increasing your portion sizes of these foods or that popping supplements will give you extra protection. So little is needed that necessary levels can easily be reached by eating the foods listed. Just be sure that you eat a good variety of these foods and eat leaner cuts of red meat up to once a week.

✓ **Omega-3 fatty acids**, which are anti-inflammatory, may help keep the immune system balanced. Research in this area is still very preliminary, but it wouldn't hurt to aim to eat the recommended two to three weekly servings of fatty fish, such as salmon, tuna, herring, sardines and black cod, since they promote heart and brain health, too.



Gelson's Registered Dietitian, Jessica Siegel, has a Masters in Public Health. However, she is not a doctor and her nutritional recommendations are not tailored to specific health problems. Consult your physician before beginning any nutritional program. To contact Jessica, please call her at 1-800-GELSONS.

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✓ **Mushrooms** contain beta glucans, a type of soluble fiber that enhances the immune system. Mushrooms, such as the shiitake, oyster, enoki, portobello and maitake varieties, are usually touted for their immune-boosting powers, and these large carbohydrate molecules are the reason. They may help increase the number and activity of immune cells and defend against bacteria and viruses that enter the system. Whole grains, mainly oats and barley, also contain beta glucans.

✓ **Probiotics** are the live and active cultures found in yogurt and other fermented dairy products, like kefir. There is some good evidence that certain cultures help to strengthen the body's defenses by populating the gut with "good" bacteria. Our digestive tract is considered the largest immune organ in the body, since we ingest so many germs, and the probiotic bacteria, as well as our stomach acid, can help to fight them off. Cultures such as lactobacillus acidophilus and lactobacillus GG are "good" bacteria that live in the intestine and may protect against diarrhea, as well as boost the immune system. Eating a good quality yogurt every day can help populate your gut with immune-enhancing bacteria. Look for yogurts that say "contains live and active cultures" on the container.

✓ **Water** is important for optimal hydration, which helps keep nasal passages and other mucous membranes moist so that they can act as barriers to bacterial and viral invaders. Water is also important for helping your immune

system run smoothly. Consider using a humidifier at home to help hydrate from the outside-in and drink plenty of water throughout the day.

✓ **Washing your hands** frequently is perhaps the most important thing you can do to prevent illness. Use soap and water and rub your hands together vigorously for 20 seconds (or sing "Happy Birthday" twice) to kill all the bacteria that can cause colds, flus or even give you diarrhea. Be mindful of what you touch and try to avoid touching your face, especially your mouth, nose and eyes, as much as possible, since they are common points of entry for infections.

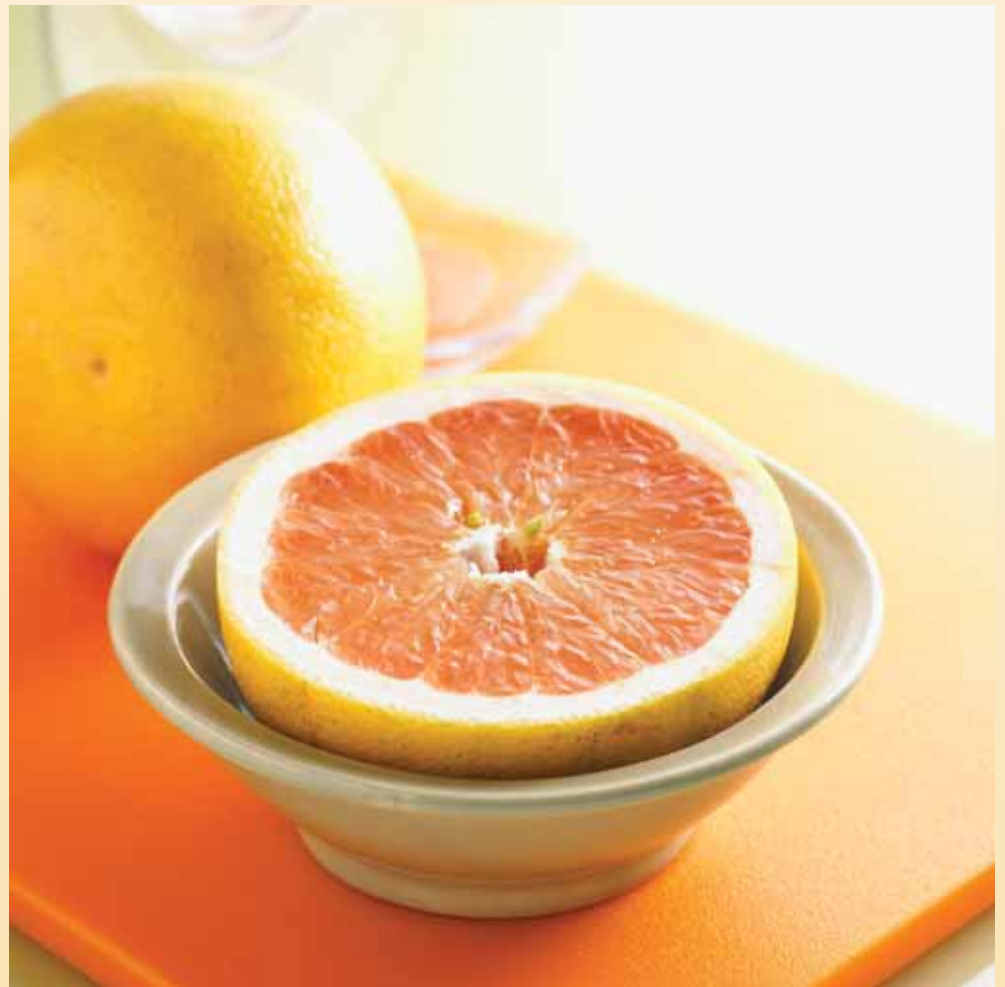
✓ **Moderate, regular exercise**, especially yoga and walking, can help to maintain a healthy immune system. Both have stress-reduction benefits, which can help free up our immune systems to make more powerful disease-fighting cells. Yoga seems to be especially helpful for those prone to respiratory problems, like colds, asthma, allergies and chest infections. If you're in the throes of an illness, however, try to stay out of the gym or yoga studio, since it's bad karma to spread your germs and you may

run down your immune system even more. Surprisingly, intense or prolonged workouts can actually weaken the immune system, so don't overdo it.

✓ **Adequate sleep** goes a long way towards helping your body repair itself and boost the number of killer cells your immune system makes to fight off illness. Even minor sleep deprivation can suppress our immune systems. Most of us need seven to nine hours of shut-eye each night.

✓ **The flu shot** is an important preventive measure you can take against the seasonal flu. Although it is best to get it before flu season begins in November, it is never too late. Since the strain is different every year, it is necessary to get a new vaccination every fall.

The best cold and flu protection is integral: try to eat a variety of nutritious foods, engage in regular aerobic exercise, drink plenty of water, attain adequate sleep each night, get a flu shot and have fun this holiday season. Laughing can help boost your immune system, too!



Immune-Boosting Weeknight Dinner Menu

I'm keeping things simple for this December menu. Warm, hearty, mostly one-dish meals that are rich in ingredients that support a healthy immune system are my focus for this weeknight's worth of menus. I know that your time is at a premium during the holidays, so simple meals with great leftover potential are an important incentive for cooking. Furthermore, holiday meals, parties and treats mean that extra calories are everywhere, so these menus emphasize filling, low calorie vegetables and fruits that will satisfy without making you gain weight.

IMMUNE-BOOSTING WEEKNIGHT DINNER MENU

Day	Protein	Vegetable 1	Vegetable 2	Starch	Fruit Dessert
Monday	Heart-Healthy Black Cod*	Wild Mushrooms with Herb Bread Crumbs**	(in the black cod)	none	Fuyu persimmon wedges
Tuesday	Moroccan Braised Chicken*	Mâche Salad with Shaved Parmesan*	(in the chicken)	(in the chicken)	Red grapes
Wednesday	Super Antioxidant Chili**	(in the chili)	(in the chili)	(in the chili)	Pomegranate arils
Thursday	Zesty Halibut with Sweet Potatoes & Kale*	(in the halibut)	(in the halibut)	(in the halibut)	Apple wedges
Friday	Asian Chicken Noodle Soup*	(in the soup)	(in the soup)	(in the soup)	Tangerines

*Recipe can be found at www.gelsons.com. **See recipe in this newsletter and at www.gelsons.com.

SUPER ANTIOXIDANT CHILI

Serves: 6

This is my absolute favorite vegetarian chili recipe and I promise that you won't miss the meat! It is perfect for bolstering your immune system this winter since it is loaded with antioxidants.

Ingredients:

2 tablespoons *Napa Valley* organic olive oil
 3 medium or 2 large organic onions, chopped
 1 medium red jalapeño pepper, seeded and diced
 4 cloves *Melissa's* organic garlic, minced
 1 medium carrot, peeled and diced
 ¾ pound orange-fleshed sweet potato, diced
 ⅛–¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
 2 teaspoons chili powder
 2 teaspoons ground cumin
 3 15-ounce cans *Westbrae Organic* black beans, rinsed and drained
 2½ cups *Pacific Natural Foods* organic low sodium vegetable broth
 2 14.5-ounce cans *Muir Glen Organic* no salt added diced tomatoes
 1 bunch red Swiss chard, thick part of stems removed, leaves and thin stems chopped
 ¼ teaspoon kosher salt
 ¾ teaspoon black pepper
 6 tablespoons *Tillamook* sharp shredded cheddar cheese (optional)

Directions:

Heat oil over medium heat in a large stock pot. Add onion and jalapeño and cook until onions are clear, about eight minutes. Add garlic and cook 30 seconds. Add carrot and sweet potato and season with cayenne, chili powder and cumin; cook for five minutes, stirring occasionally. Add black beans, broth and tomatoes and cover. Bring to a boil; reduce heat and uncover partially. Simmer about 25 minutes; uncover and simmer 20 more minutes, until sweet potatoes are tender and chili has thickened. Stir in chard, salt and pepper. Allow chard to wilt, about three minutes. Ladle two cups into each bowl and top with one tablespoon of cheese if desired.

WILD MUSHROOMS WITH HERB BREAD CRUMBS

Serves: 4

Mushrooms can help shore up your immune system, and we even offer vitamin D-fortified maitake mushrooms for an extra immune boost. You don't need to clean maitake mushrooms, but you should gently wipe the stems of oyster and enoki mushrooms and the caps of shiitake mushrooms with a damp paper towel or mushroom brush.

Ingredients:

½ cup fresh Italian parsley, minced
 2 tablespoons *Ian's* Panko bread crumbs
 5 teaspoons *Napa Valley* organic olive oil, divided
 8 ounces fresh shiitake mushrooms, stems discarded, cut in half and sliced
 4 ounces fresh oyster mushrooms, tough stems discarded, sliced
 3.5 ounces fresh maitake mushrooms, bottom part of stem discarded, mushrooms separated
 ¼ teaspoon salt
 ¼ teaspoon black pepper
 3.5 ounces enoki mushrooms, connected stem discarded
 2 cloves *Melissa's* organic garlic, minced
 2 tablespoons medium dry sherry

Directions:

Preheat oven to 350° Fahrenheit. Toss the parsley with the bread crumbs and one teaspoon olive oil on a rimmed baking sheet. Bake 15–20 minutes, until crisp and let cool.

Heat remaining four teaspoons olive oil in a large sauté pan over medium heat. Add shiitake, oyster and maitake mushrooms. Sauté until tender, about eight minutes. Add enoki mushrooms and garlic. Cook one minute. Pour in sherry and cook until it evaporates, about three minutes. Remove from heat and transfer to a serving bowl. Stir in all but a spoonful of bread crumbs and sprinkle remaining spoonful over the top for garnish.

Naked Food of the Month: Winter Squash



What do acorn squash, zucchini, cucumber and watermelon have in common? They're all delicious, nutritious members of the gourd family. Winter squashes come in over 100 varieties, and no matter which type you choose to cook up, they all require very little preparation in order to taste great—in other words, they are delicious naked.

These starchy vegetables are high in fiber and other complex carbohydrates, so they give you energy but not a lot of calories. When eaten in place of refined grains, like bread and rice, starchy vegetables can help control weight and appetite by keeping blood sugar at even levels—especially when paired with some protein and healthful fat. The orange-fleshed squash varieties, like sugar pie pumpkin, banana, kabocha and butternut, are loaded with beta-carotene. This phytonutrient is converted into vitamin A in our bodies and acts as an antioxidant to help protect against cancer and cataract development. It has also been shown to play a role in proper immune function.

A serving of winter squash is just one cup of cooked cubed or mashed flesh (the skin and

most seeds are inedible). Depending on the variety, they can range from 80-120 calories and 4-10 grams of fiber per serving. Squashes are also an excellent source of vitamin C and potassium.

This fall, Gelson's offers many squash varieties, including organic butternut, delicata, sugar pie pumpkin, organic spaghetti, kabocha, organic acorn, gold nugget, banana and sweet dumpling. Winter squash is the freshest in the fall and winter, but has more beta-carotene in the spring and summer, after it has been stored for a while. When selecting your squash, look for a smooth, dry rind that is free of soft spots and cracks. A good specimen is dull, velvety and heavy for its size. Edible pumpkins are sugar pumpkins, which weigh less than seven pounds (jack-o-lanterns for carving and mini decorative pumpkins are not edible). Most of the other winter squashes you'll find in Gelson's produce department this fall and winter will be edible and delicious—just ask

if you're not sure. You can store whole winter squashes for over three months if you keep them in a cool, dry place (pumpkins only keep for about a month). Cut squash can be kept up to a week if wrapped tightly and stored in the refrigerator.

Preparing winter squash for cooking requires a sharp, heavy knife. Wash them well to start. You can bake a whole squash, which is the easiest and most nutritious option. They can be cooked fully when whole or just long enough to soften it for cutting. Either way, you must pierce it deeply in several places around the top first and then set it in a baking pan. Never cook or microwave one whole—it will explode! To split a raw gourd, make a notch in the rind with a heavy knife. Place the blade in the groove and tap the base of the knife (near the handle) with your fist or a mallet until it cuts through. Remove the strings and seeds and peel with a vegetable peeler or paring knife, if desired. Boiling, steaming, roasting, baking, microwaving and pressure cooking are all viable options for cooking cut pieces, which can then be mashed or added to soups, stews and tarts. Pair squash with flavorful cheeses, garlic, mushrooms, sage, thyme, rosemary, cinnamon, cayenne pepper, ginger or nuts. This month, try my recipe for Butternut Squash with Caramelized Onions.

Read My New Blog!

I want to help you raise healthy eaters, so I have started a blog called *Healthy Families* on our website, www.gelsons.com. I document my experiences and thoughts about feeding my 18-month old daughter and hopefully impart some worthwhile nutritional wisdom to my readers. Please check it weekly and join me on this very important parenting journey.