



Nutrition Fact Sheet

Tips To Boost Resident Immunity In Aged Care

Have you heard of the term “immunosenescence”? It is defined as the gradual decline of the immune system as a result of aging. This leads to higher risks of developing health complications such as cancer, infections, autoimmune diseases and inflammation. In this fact sheet, we explore some practical tips and key nutrients that can help boost immunity and promote healthy aging.

EAT A WELL-BALANCED DIET

Eating a well-balanced diet that is rich in fruits and vegetables, wholegrains, and lean proteins, is always of great importance to meet our nutritional needs and promote a healthy immune system.

However, this can be harder to achieve for elderly people due to a range of factors such as reduced appetite, chewing/swallowing difficulties, illness, multiple medications, malabsorption, loneliness and dementia, etc.

Practical tips to improve nutrition for elderly people:

- **Make meals and snacks nutrient dense.** “Make every mouthful count” by adding extra protein and calories to meals without increasing the portion size. Some examples include adding extra cheese to meals, mixing powdered skim milk into milk or milk drinks, and adding honey or syrup to cereals and dessert.
- **Small and frequent meals.** Have 6 small meals a day (i.e. 3 main meals plus 3 mid meals).
- **Use herbs and spices** to enhance flavour. E.g. garlic, basil, cinnamon, oregano, thyme, etc.
- **Make meals colourful and appealing.**

KEY NUTRIENTS FOR HEALTHY IMMUNE SYSTEM

There is no one food, nutrient or supplement that can prevent illness. By eating a well balanced diet, that includes the following nutrients, will help to ensure normal immune functions.

Protein

Protein plays important roles in maintaining healthy immune system, as well as healing and recovery.

Food sources of protein include lean meat, poultry, seafood, eggs, and legumes.

Vitamin A

Vitamin A is involved in the development of the immune system and plays regulatory roles in immune responses.

Food sources of vitamin A include sweet potatoes, carrots, pumpkins, mangos, cheese, eggs and milk.

Vitamin C

Vitamin C supports the immune system by protecting against oxidative stress, aiding in microbial killing, and preventing tissue damage.



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Food sources of vitamin C include citrus fruits (oranges, grapefruit, mandarins), capsicums, strawberries and tomatoes.

Vitamin E

Vitamin E can help enhance the function of immune system and reduce oxidative stress.

Food sources of vitamin E include sunflower seeds, almonds, hazelnuts and vegetable oil.

Zinc

Zinc helps keep the immune system strong by fighting off invading bacteria and viruses, helps wound healing and supports normal growth.

Food sources of zinc include lean meat, poultry, seafood, milk and wholegrains.

HYDRATION

Drink plenty of water throughout the day is essential for good health and immunity. Aim for at least 8 glasses of water a day.

Dehydration can cause lethargy, fatigue, worsen cold and flu symptoms, and slow down digestion.

Elderly people are more prone to dehydration due to a number of factors such as decreased thirst

sensation, use of medications, dementia, and loss of independence.

Hydration tips for elderly people:

- Keep water containers in accessible places.
- Drink even when you aren't thirsty.
- Add slices of lemon or orange or ice cubes to give water a fresher taste.
- Eat foods with high water content (e.g. fruit and vegetables).
- Broths, soups, milk, smoothies, etc. all count towards your total water intake.
- Build hydration into your routine. For example, drink a glass of water when you wake up in the morning, after meals, and before or after exercise.

OTHER HEALTHY LIFESTYLE TIPS FOR BOOSTING IMMUNITY

- Get active for at least 30 minutes each day.
- Aim for at least 7-8 hours of sleep each day.
- Get recommended vaccine if you can.
- Try to minimise stress.
- Minimise infection by washing your hands regularly and cooking meat thoroughly.

For more information, please visit:

Nutrition and Immunity

<https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/nutrition-and-immunity/>

Supporting Your Immune System

<https://nutritionaustralia.org/app/uploads/2020/09/Fact-sheet-Supporting-your-immune-system.pdf>