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# DOOR STEP NUTRITION

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## How You Can Help Your Immune System Help You!

Your immune system is a complex network of cells, tissues, organs, and the substances they make that helps the body fight infections and other diseases. The immune system includes white blood cells, organs, and tissues of the lymph system, such as the thymus, spleen, tonsils, lymph nodes, lymph vessels, and bone marrow. Your immune system works to recognize and identify an infection or injury in the body. This causes an immune response, with the goal of restoring normal function. The key to keeping your immune system working properly is to take care of your body to keep it strong. Here are a few key tips that may improve your body's response to a virus, infection, or other disease.

1. Focus on eating a healthy diet, especially focus on increasing your fruit and vegetable intake. Fruits and vegetables are excellent sources of vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. Citrus fruits, berries, and spinach are a great way to increase your vitamin C intake. Beta-carotene converts into vitamin A which can help to improve antibody response. Beta-carotene is found in sweet potatoes, carrots, apricots, and winter squash. Vitamin E plays a role in immunity; sources include nuts, seeds, avocado, and spinach. Vitamin D is essential to immunity and is found in salmon, canned tuna, egg yolks, mushrooms, and fortified milk. Our immune system uses zinc to function properly; sources include shellfish, poultry, red meat, and beans. Garlic contains compounds that aid the immune system in fighting germs. Yogurt is a great source of

probiotics which can help to improve gut health which in turn improves immunity. Other sources of probiotics include kombucha and sauerkraut. You likely are already consuming many of the nutrients previously mentioned if you follow a well-balanced diet filled with a variety of foods from all of the food groups. If you feel your diet is inadequate you may want to supplement with a multivitamin. Remember to consult your doctor before beginning any new vitamin or other supplement.

2. Get enough sleep. Aim for 7 or more hours each night.
3. Stop smoking.
4. Limit alcohol consumption.
5. Try to minimize stress and anxiety by doing things that lead to relaxation such as reading, exercising, talking to a friend, or praying.
6. Go outside and sit in the sunshine! This is a great way to increase your body's vitamin D levels. Adequate vitamin D has shown to improve immunity.
7. Try to stay physically active, even if it's 15 minutes daily or several short increments throughout the day.
8. Drink water. Staying hydrated keeps your body functioning properly. Some fruits and vegetables have a very high water content including watermelon, cucumbers, and celery.
9. Wash your hands regularly and often.

