
Your Guide to Eating For Immunity

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Your body is constantly encountering viruses, bacterias and other pathogens all day long. As a cancer patient, you may know that poor nutrition is one of the most common reasons for immune system failure. A healthy immune system is needed to recognize and eliminate harmful things, like cancer cells, from the body. Why not renew your defenses by consuming these nutrient-rich foods found to support the health of your immune system?

VITAMIN A

Antiviral activity is just one of the benefits of Vitamin A. Researchers have demonstrated Vitamin A reverses oral leukoplakia and helps to maintain immune competence post operatively and throughout radiation therapy. Both Vitamin A and beta carotene have been shown to inhibit the growth of certain cancer cells.

Food sources include liver, butter and milk. Carotenes, substances that can be converted to Vitamin A in the body, are found in collards, spinach, carrots, sweet potatoes, yams, apricots, mangoes, squash, legumes, grains and seeds.

VITAMIN B6

Vitamin B6 makes it possible for phagocytes (types of white blood cells) to swallow up foreign substances in the body and support thymus gland function. This nutrient is required for red blood cell production and may be helpful in reducing damage from radiation therapy.

Found in avocados, bananas, kidney beans, poultry, salmon, barley and corn. Fair sources of B6 include lima beans, tuna, crab, soy beans, broccoli, cauliflower and brown rice.

VITAMIN C

This water soluble "cure for the common cold" has many health enhancing properties. It has potent antiviral and antibacterial actions and combats the effects of free radicals. Studies have indicated ascorbic acid reduces the risk of stomach, esophageal, larynx, oral cavity and pancreatic cancers.

Found in green, leafy vegetables like collard greens, broccoli and kale, and in citrus fruits like kiwi, oranges, grapefruits, cantaloupe and strawberries. Other good C sources include tomatoes, papaya, cranberries, mustard and turnip greens.

CALCIUM

Calcium works with vitamin C to ensure white blood cells can digest and destroy pathogens and works with magnesium to make complement (the second-string defense team).

Dairy foods top the list of food sources for calcium content--just make sure you choose low fat products. Eating sardines with bones, herring, collard greens, broccoli, bok choy and tofu provides a good amount of dietary calcium.

MAGNESIUM

This important mineral (essential for calcium absorption!) strengthens the immune system by supporting thymus function and helps to make complement, a back-up defense mechanism that destroys tumor cells.

Magnesium deficiency is a risk factor for the development of leukemia and lymphoma.

Found in soybeans, almonds, cashews, black eyed peas, and lima or kidney beans. Fair sources include bran, peanuts, bananas, spinach and oatmeal.

SELENIUM

Selenium as an essential ingredient for glutathione peroxidase, an enzyme that helps protect the body against free radicals. Animal studies indicate that selenium inhibits the formation of tumors and may slow their growth. Additionally, selenium may reduce the risk of stomach and esophageal cancer.

Concentrated sources of selenium include swordfish and Brazil nuts. Other sources are salmon, tuna, lobster, shrimp, haddock, sunflower seeds, barley, onions, garlic and brown rice.

ZINC

This nutrient is required for T-cell (a white blood cell responsible for fighting pathogens) production and maturation. Low zinc levels have been associated with taste alterations and delayed wound healing from surgery in radiation and chemotherapy damaged tissues.

Sources of zinc include nuts, whole grains, oysters, poultry, split peas, lima beans, sardines, haddock, turnips, potatoes, almonds, walnuts and garlic.