



Foods to fight cold and flu

Cold and flu season is officially here! To prevent getting sick (or at least to lessen the severity and length of your cold), it's crucial to strengthen our immune system, and a healthy diet plays a key role. While there's no single food or supplement that guarantees immunity, certain nutrients can help your body's natural defense.

How does food have the power to optimize your immune response and resistance to infection?

Nutrient-Rich Diet for Strong Immunity: Foods rich in vitamins A, C, D, E, and minerals like zinc and selenium are vital. These are found in colorful fruits and vegetables, nuts, and seeds, far surpassing supplements in effectiveness (with the exception of vitamin D). See the table below.

Gut Health Equals Good Health: Did you know a lot of our immune system is in our gut? Eating fiber-rich foods (vegetables, fruits, whole grains, nuts, seeds, and beans) and probiotics like unsweetened yogurt can boost gut health, thus enhancing immunity.

Antioxidants for Defense: Antioxidants combat oxidative stress that can weaken immunity. Load up on colorful fruits and veggies like berries, carrots, and leafy greens.

Healthy Fats for Balance: Omega-3 fatty acids, found in fish, flaxseeds, chia seeds, walnuts, and soy, have anti-inflammatory properties essential for regulating immunity.

Stay Hydrated: Water isn't just for quenching thirst; it's vital for immune health. It aids in producing lymph, a fluid that carries immune cells.

Getting enough of the nutrients you need for a strong immune system means a wide variety of healthy foods. Here are some examples:

Vitamin A (beta-carotene): Green leafy vegetables (broccoli, spinach, kale, etc.), orange and yellow vegetables, such as carrots, sweet potatoes, red peppers, pumpkin, etc.), orange fruits (cantaloupe, apricots, mangoes, etc.), beans.

Vitamin C: Citrus fruits such as oranges, pomelo, and grapefruit, bell peppers, broccoli, potatoes, tomatoes, kiwi, strawberries, cantaloupe.

Vitamin D: UV light-treated mushrooms, fortified plant and cow milks, fortified breakfast cereals, fatty fish, eggs, vitamin D supplements (which many health providers recommend).

Vitamin E: Nuts like almonds and hazelnuts, whole grains, wheat germ, vegetable oils, sunflower seeds.

Selenium: Brazil nuts, whole grains, seafood.

Zinc: Beans, peas, nuts, seeds, whole grains, seafood.

Pasta Fagiole with Spinach Mushroom Marinara Sauce



[Recipe and photo courtesy of cuisinicity.com](http://cuisinicity.com)

Ingredients

- 1 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 4 garlic cloves, chopped
- 1 (8 oz) package raw sliced mushrooms (rinsed)
- 2 (8 oz) bags fresh pre-washed spinach
- 1 jar (32 oz) marinara sauce (no added sugar)
- 1 large can (1 lb, 13 oz) small canellini beans, well rinsed and drained
- ½ cup pitted calamata olives
- 1 bay laurel leaf
- ½ tsp dry thyme leaves
- ⅛ tsp salt
- fresh ground pepper
- 12-16 oz whole grain pasta, cooked according to package directions

Instructions:

Heat olive oil in a large pan and sauté chopped garlic for a few seconds.

Add the sliced mushrooms and sauté for 5 minutes then, add the fresh spinach (one bag at a time as it is very bulky but, not to worry, it cooks down quickly!).

Once the spinach is completely wilted (5-6 minutes), add the remaining ingredients and simmer for 10-12 minutes, uncovered.

Serve over whole wheat pasta.

Serves 4.

Tip: You can swap out the pasta for any intact whole grain like barley, brown rice, or quinoa; the white beans for chickpeas; the spinach for other leafy greens (it may take longer to cook other greens).