

## How can I boost my immune system? <sup>[1]</sup>

Dear Alice,

I was wondering what I personally can do (habits, diets, activities) to strengthen my immune system? Thank you!

? GAEF

### Answer

Dear GAEF,

This is a great question ? with a slightly complex answer. Researchers and public health professionals have yet to find direct and conclusive scientific evidence linking certain lifestyle habits to "boosts" in the immune system. However, researchers have a pretty good idea about how to protect your body, and thereby your immune system, from environmental factors (more on that later). Practicing healthy lifestyle habits are your best bet for keeping your immune system functioning optimally!

There are a few reasons for the lack of scientific evidence regarding boosting immune function. First, your immune system is very complex ? researchers are still trying to understand this complicated and intricate system, which makes it difficult to determine what factors actually improve it. For instance it may make sense to increase the number of cells in your body so there are more available to fight off infections, but that may lead to other more negative side effects such as stroke. Secondly, scientists aren't sure which parts of the immune system to boost and how to measure it.

Now, more on how to support your immune function. Below are a few things you can do to help keep it going strong and prevent illness:

- **Reducing and managing stress** <sup>[2]</sup>, such as effective time management ? long periods of stress can weaken the immune response.
- **Getting at least seven to nine hours of quality sleep every night** ? deep sleep stimulates and energizes the immune system. For more information on how to maximize your sleep, check out the [Sleep](#) <sup>[3]</sup> category in the *Go Ask Alice!* archives.
- **Maintaining a healthy weight** ? obesity can lead to a weakened immune system.
- **Getting some physical activity in on the regular** ? being active stimulates the immune system and helps with cardiovascular health, blood pressure, and can protect against a variety of diseases. It also helps improve blood circulation, which makes it

easier for the cells in the immune system to function more efficiently.

- **Chowing down on a healthy diet** and getting the recommended daily values of nutrients. Experts recommend getting as many vitamins and minerals as possible through food, rather than through [supplements](#) [4]. This is because the body absorbs nutrients from food more effectively. Check out the [Optimal Nutrition](#) [5] category in the *Go Ask Alice!* archives for more information on maintaining your healthy diet!
- **Washing your hands** thoroughly and often with soap and warm water, particularly before eating and after using the bathroom. This reduces the number of viruses and bacteria that can enter your body.
- **Consuming alcohol moderately (if at all)** ? while one drink does not appear to affect immune response, having three or more drinks in a short period starts to impair white blood cells' functioning.
- **Not smoking** ? smoking weakens the immune system and can lead to lung and other cancers.
- **Getting preventative vaccines** recommended by your health care provider.

Each of these behaviors can help you achieve a balanced and healthy lifestyle. While unchangeable factors such as genes, age, and family histories can also influence immunity, people who incorporate healthier patterns into their daily living increase the likelihood for better health! If you'd like to learn more about how to incorporate these into your day-to-day, consider making an appointment with a health promotion professional or your health care provider.

Alice!

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