



Eat healthfully to fight the flu bug

Is there anything we can do nutritionally that would help me and my family stay healthy during the flu season?

Sure. Dietitians encourage a few basic practices that could boost your immune system and help your body fight the flu bug. They include:

- Stay hydrated. Getting the proper hydration keeps mucous membranes soft and moist, preventing tiny cracks that allow viruses and bacteria to enter your system. How much fluid is enough? A general guideline is to divide your weight by two — that's the minimum number of ounces of fluid you should drink every day.

- Eat lots of plant-based foods. A diet rich in vegetables, fruit and whole grains is not only loaded with vitamins and minerals but is also high in antioxidants and phytonutrients, which can boost the immune system.

- Get a moderate amount of exercise. Moderate exercise boosts the immune system, while too much or too little can weaken it.

In addition, you may consider consuming more yogurt and other foods containing probiotics. Probiotics are live microorganisms often called "good bacteria." Look on food labels — foods containing probiotics include yogurt, fermented and unfermented milk, miso, tempeh, and some juices and soy beverages.

While research on the health effects of probiotics is not completely conclusive, several studies on specific strains indicate they can help the im-

mune system. For example, a study of Chinese preschoolers in a recent issue of *Pediatrics* found that children who were given the probiotic *Lactobacillus acidophilus* NCFM in their milk every weekday for six months had reduced incidence of fever and coughing than children who didn't receive it. Even better was another group in the study who received both that probiotic and another, *Bifidobacterium animalis* subsp *lactis* Bi-07 — this group also had runny nose less frequently. Plus, children who took the probiotics who did become ill got better more quickly than other children.

With probiotics, specific strains matter, so do some research if you're serious about using probiotics to boost your immune system. Also, be sure to look for the word "live" on the label indicating that the bacteria are still living, and pay attention to the expiration date. The foods may still taste OK after the date, but it's likely that the good bacteria are no longer living.

And, of course, always follow proper hygiene practices to prevent spread of disease. Wash your hands frequently and use alcohol-based sanitizers. Always cover your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze. Avoid touching your face, especially your eyes, nose and mouth — that's how germs spread. And stay home and away from other people if you get sick.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu.



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