

Immune-boosting foods may add to flu defense

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Nutritional deficiencies impede your ability to fight infection, expert cautions.

(HealthDay)—As U.S. health officials recommend flu shots and frequent hand washing for protection during this season's influenza outbreak, dietitians point to another significant defense weapon: healthy foods.

Immune-boosting foods can improve your ability to ward off the flu and other health problems, according to the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

Even a small nutritional deficiency can affect the body's ability to stay healthy, said Heather Mangieri, a registered dietitian and academy spokesperson.

"A strong immune system doesn't guarantee your body can fight off every [flu bug](#), but it is a powerful defense," said Mangieri in an academy news release. "Good nutrition is essential to a strong immune response."

Mangieri provided the following overview of foods that may boost the immune system:

- Protein is an essential part of your body's defense system. Sources of protein include seafood, lean meat, poultry, eggs, beans and peas, soy products and unsalted nuts and seeds.
- Vitamin A helps prevent infections by keeping the skin and tissues in the mouth, stomach, lungs and intestines healthy. This nutrient, found in [sweet potatoes](#), carrots, kale, spinach and red bell peppers, also helps the body regulate the immune system.
- Vitamin C triggers the production of immune-boosting antibodies. Oranges, grapefruit, strawberries and tangerines are among the foods rich in vitamin C.
- Vitamin E is an antioxidant that may provide a boost to the immune system. People who want to get more vitamin E in their diet should eat [sunflower seeds](#), almonds, sunflower or safflower oil, hazelnuts, peanut butter or spinach.
- Some believe that zinc, a nutrient found in lean beef, wheat germ, crab, [wheat bran](#), sunflower seeds, black-eyed peas, almonds, milk and tofu, may also improve functioning of the immune system.

If you're unsure about what foods to eat to boost your immune system, Mangieri said a registered dietitian can help.

"A registered dietitian can help ensure you're getting the nutrients your body needs to function and protect itself," Mangieri explained.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides more information on [the seasonal flu](#).

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