

NUTRITION



F A C T S H E E T

Eat Your Way to Better Health: A Nutrient-Rich Diet Helps Support the Immune System and Fight Disease

A strong immune system is one of your best defenses against infections from bacteria and viruses. And, a healthy immune response helps protect against other health problems such as arthritis and certain types of cancer. Good nutrition is essential to maintaining the immune system's ability to function at optimal levels.

Consuming a variety of nutrient-rich foods gives your body the nutrition it needs every day to help protect against illness and reduce the risk of chronic disease. Taking small steps can help you create healthy habits that will benefit your health now, and for the rest of your life. One of the most important steps you can take is to choose a variety of nutrient-rich foods everyday. Here are some simple tips for incorporating nutrient-rich foods into your diet:

- **Start your day with a healthy breakfast.** Total nutrient intake for the day is usually higher for children and adults who eat breakfast. A breakfast of whole grain cereal, milk and 100 percent orange juice can provide 100 percent of the vitamin C, 33 percent of the calcium and a good supply of folate and other nutrients for a day.
- **Swap whole grains for refined grains.** Simply changing to whole grain alternatives adds more nutrient-rich foods to your diet. Whole grain breads, brown rice and whole grain cereal can help enhance fiber intake while providing protective antioxidants. Be sure to check the ingredients label to make sure a food contains whole grain. Snacking on whole wheat crackers or popcorn is a quick way to get the nutritional benefits of whole grains.
- **Trouble-free veggies:** Grab a bag of pre-washed salad greens and a variety of pre-cut veggies for a quick, nutrient-rich salad. Toss chopped

steamed or sautéed vegetables with your favorite pasta or on top of pizza to add more nutrition to your favorite meals. Color your plate with a variety of vegetables—red, orange, green, and yellow—to get key vitamins and minerals such as potassium.

- **Choose fresh, whole fruit.** Opt for fresh fruit as a convenient on-the-go snack or a naturally sweet dessert. Smoothies are another easy way to add more fresh fruit to your diet. Just whip up some fresh or frozen fruit, low-fat yogurt, fat-free milk, and orange juice in a blender for a cool, refreshing drink that's great tasting and packed with nutrients.
- **Sneak in some beans.** Whether they're pinto, kidney, black, or navy beans—even chickpeas—all beans provide fiber, folate, and flavonoids which are important to maintaining overall health. Try them in salads, soups, burritos, mixed with rice or pasta, or just plain baked.

Also look for foods containing the following essential nutrients and antioxidants:

- **Vitamin C:** One of the most powerful antioxidants, vitamin C, is a key nutrient to help the body maintain a healthy immune system.

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Vitamin C's antioxidant action may help neutralize free radicals that can cause cell and tissue damage. Over a lifetime, this may contribute to the development of diseases such

DRINK TO YOUR HEALTH

The simple habit of starting your day with a glass of 100 percent orange juice can help provide you with a lifetime of better health. This easy habit will provide nutrients that can help your body fight the following long-term diseases:

Heart Health

One hundred percent orange juice is a good source of potassium. Diets rich in potassium and low in sodium may help reduce the risk of high blood pressure and stroke.

Cancer

In some studies, the consumption of higher levels of citrus fruits and juices has been associated with a lower risk of certain types of cancer.

Inflammation

Compounds found in 100 percent orange juice, such as vitamin C and flavonoids, may help your body fight inflammation which could affect the development of arthritis, cardiovascular disease, and cognitive impairment.

Bone Health

One hundred percent orange juice is a good source of potassium which may help your body fight osteoporosis by helping to neutralize acidity that could lead to loss of calcium from bone.

Birth Defects

Consuming 100 percent orange juice as part of a folate-rich diet may help lower the risk of giving birth to a baby with certain types of birth defects of the brain or spine.

as cancer and heart disease. Orange juice and citrus fruits are excellent sources of vitamin C. Other fruits and vegetables such as berries, melons, peppers, and tomatoes also supply significant amounts of vitamin C.

- **Folate:** Found in foods like orange juice, spinach, beans and fortified grain products, folate may help lower homocysteine levels in the blood. Elevated homocysteine may contribute to inflammation which is associated with an increased risk for coronary artery disease. Also, lower intake of folate as an adult has been associated in some studies with a higher risk for certain types of cancer. Adequate folate intake is also essential for young women to prevent certain birth defects of the spine.
- **Vitamin B6:** The immune system needs vitamin B6 to function effectively. It helps maintain the health of lymphoid organs that make white blood cells, which fight infections.
- **Flavonoids:** Flavonoids are substances found in certain plant foods such as citrus fruits, berries and certain vegetables. Many function as antioxidants. Scientists believe that flavonoids may help reduce the risk of cancer, heart disease and other serious health problems.

For a lifetime of better health:

- Choose more nutrient-rich foods such as fruits, vegetables and whole grains
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Be physically active
- Minimize stress
- Get plenty of sleep

For a referral to a registered dietitian and for additional food and nutrition information visit

WWW.EATRIGHT.ORG

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Registered Dietitians are the experts when it comes to helping people eat well and stay healthy. An RD has the knowledge and expertise to develop an eating plan to meet the needs of all individuals.

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