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WELLNESS WEEKLY



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 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 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 refreshing drink that's 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. 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 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.
- **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.