

Lifestyle choices will help you avoid getting a cold or influenza.

Food and healthy lifestyle choices boost your immune system, and that can prevent you from coming down with colds and flu. The key is not waiting until you get sick to make these changes; you need to revamp your diet and lifestyle *before* the cold and flu bugs get to you.

Rely on real foods, not supplements. Foods are better than dietary supplements for the prevention of colds and flu because you get the whole nutritional package. For example, Hark points out, eating an orange is better for you than just taking vitamin C pills because the orange offers you a combination of nutrients -- magnesium, potassium, folate, vitamin B-6, and antioxidant-rich flavonoids.

While we know that vitamin C is important for a healthy immune system, studies don't show that taking massive doses of vitamin C helps to prevent colds and flu at all. However, we do know that eating fruits and vegetables high in vitamin C will help to keep your immune system strong. Your immune system is what protects you from viral infections, and the foods you eat have a major impact on your immune system's ability to fight off colds and flu.

The reason that fruits and vegetables do a better job of keeping your immune system ready is because they also contain vitamins A and E, as well as the flavonoids that work along side vitamin C to keep your immune system and your whole body healthy.

Eat more fruits and vegetables. Eating lots of fruits and vegetables may help keep your immune system strong. People tend to eat fewer fruits and vegetables in the winter, which is the opposite of what you should be doing. Everyone needs at least five servings of fruits and vegetables every day to get adequate vitamins, minerals, fiber and antioxidants -- all things we need for a healthy immune system.

One way to increase your intake of fruits and vegetables is to incorporate juice into your diet. Not just any juice will do, though. Make sure you choose 100-percent juices, as other juice drinks contain extra sugar and empty calories.

For the best prices, be sure to browse your grocery store's produce aisle for fresh fruits and vegetables that are in-season. Oranges and grapefruits are usually cheaper in the winter, so cold and flu season is the perfect time to load up on citrus fruits.

Eating frozen fruits and vegetables is another economical and convenient way to improve your diet and prevent colds and flu. Frozen vegetable selections range from very inexpensive bags of basic peas, corn and green beans to artfully combined fruits and vegetable dishes topped with delicate sauces that you simply pop in the microwave.

Make fruits and vegetables part of every meal. Add berries or a sliced banana to your whole grain cereal at breakfast, and drink a glass of orange or grapefruit juice. Pack a bunch of grapes or an apple with your sandwich for lunch, and top that sandwich with tomato slices, avocado, sprouts and lettuce.

Start dinner with a salad or vegetable soup, or serve a big salad as a healthy dinner. Keep a bowl of oranges, apples and pears on your counter top to grab as quick snacks. You can also store cut vegetables in your refrigerator, but remember they'll lose some nutritional value.

Round out your diet with healthy proteins and whole grains. Eat a balanced diet with lean meats, fish, poultry, low-fat dairy, legumes, whole grains, nuts and seeds. Protein sources such as lean meats, dairy, eggs and legumes are especially important because they supply the amino acids that your body needs to build the components of your immune system.

Eating lean meats also helps you avoid zinc deficiency and iron deficiency, both of which can affect your immune system.

