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7-31-2018

## July 2018 (Issue 2) : Immunity and Diet

Aga Khan University Hospital, Karachi

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### Recommended Citation

Aga Khan University Hospital, Karachi, "July 2018 (Issue 2) : Immunity and Diet" (2018). *Nutrition Update*. Book 41.  
[https://ecommons.aku.edu/nutrition\\_update/41](https://ecommons.aku.edu/nutrition_update/41)

## IMMUNITY AND DIET

Nutrition plays an important role in maintaining the immune function; insufficiency in one or more essential nutrients may prevent the immune system from functioning at its peak. The immune system is the body's best defense against diseases. A strong immune system increases the number of white cells in the body and helps them fight infection better.

Research shows that foods packed with antioxidants can double the power of your immune system, allowing the body to keep disease and illness at bay. Nutrient-dense foods scrub out and destroy toxins that cause illness, and help your body activate its own clean-up system to provide super immunity.

### Factors that may affect your immune system:

Some of the factors that can weaken the immune system include:

- Psychological stress
- Age
- Exercise
- Poor eating habits
- Lack of sleep
- Unhealthy lifestyle habits.

### Healthy lifestyle hacks:

Your first line of defense against a weak immune system is to choose a healthy lifestyle. Developing the below habits can help your immune system become strong and healthy naturally. Every part of your body, including your immune system, functions better when protected from environmental assaults and bolstered by healthy-living habits such as:

- Not smoking
- Exercising regularly
- Following a diet rich in fruits and vegetables
- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Getting adequate sleep
- Trying to minimize stress
- Taking steps to avoid infection, such as washing your hands frequently and cooking meats thoroughly.

### What can I do to maintain a strong immune system?

- Exercise regularly. Living a healthy and active lifestyle is critical to improving one's immune system.
- Eat a healthful, balanced diet; this can be your best investment in immunity.
- Consume micronutrients and phytonutrients (vegetables) which support healthy immune function.
- Consume adequate protein and healthy fats.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Wash hands frequently, especially before touching food, after touching raw meat, and after visiting the washroom.
- Socialize more frequently. This might sound strange, but studies indicate that people who socialize often are less likely to get sick or stay sick for a shorter period. On the other hand, people who are more solitary, have weaker immune systems.



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