

The immune system is your body’s primary mechanism of defense, responsible for protecting you from potentially harmful invaders, including viruses. Certain lifestyle interventions can support your immune function, including:

* Maintaining a balanced [healthy diet](https://fs-marketing-files.s3.amazonaws.com/resources/components-of-a-healthy-diet.pdf), which focuses on whole, unprocessed foods high in anti-oxidants
* Engaging in regular [physical activity](https://fs-marketing-files.s3.amazonaws.com/resources/physical-activity-handout.pdf)
* Getting adequate, good-quality [sleep](https://fs-marketing-files.s3.amazonaws.com/resources/sleep-hygiene-patient-handout.pdf) - the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that adults sleep for seven or more hours per night
* Managing your stress, which may include counseling and relaxation techniques such as [mindfulness](https://fs-marketing-files.s3.amazonaws.com/resources/mindfulness-handout.pdf) and [meditation](https://fullscript.com/blog/health-benefits-of-meditation)

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The following evidence-based dietary supplement ingredients may provide immune support for viral infections.

**Astragalus (*Astragalus membranaceus*)**
Astragalus is a botanical herb with anti-inflammatory, anti-oxidant, anti-viral, and immunomodulating properties. While traditionally used in Chinese medicine to treat individuals with increased susceptibility to infections, studies suggest astragalus may improve immune activity in certain conditions, such as myocarditis induced by viral infections. Research has also shown that astragalus may have anti-influenza virus properties.

[**Find astragalus-containing supplements on Fullscript**](https://ca.fullscript.com/u/catalog?s=VGFnLTIyNQ%3D%3D&ct=VGFnLTQwNA%3D%3D&ct=VGFnLTM5OA%3D%3D)

**Colostrum**
The first milk that comes from a mammal after giving birth, known as colostrum, is high in immunomodulatory compounds and growth factors. As a dietary supplement, bovine colostrum may help support immune and gastrointestinal health. Colostrum contains compounds known as immunoglobulins which may prevent upper respiratory tract infections, gastrointestinal infections, and certain types of inflammation.

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**Echinacea (*Echinacea purpurea*)**
Echinacea, also referred to as purple coneflower or American coneflower, is a botanical herb that is widely used for its immune-supportive effects. Research demonstrates that echinacea may reduce the risk of the common cold, the duration of a cold, and the incidence of viral infections, such as influenza.

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**Elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*)**
Black elderberry, commonly available as an extract in syrup or lozenge form, has been shown to have anti-viral properties. Elderberry supplementation may help improve symptoms of the cold and flu and reduce the duration of infections in adults and children.

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**Probiotics**
Probiotics are beneficial live microorganisms that may support immune health by modulating immune responses and inhibiting the growth of pathogens in the gastrointestinal tract. Probiotics may be obtained from fermented foods, including yogurt, kefir, sauerkraut. unpasteurized pickled vegetables, and kombucha. Probiotic supplements may help protect healthy individuals against respiratory infections, reduce the severity of colds, and improve the efficacy of certain influenza vaccinations.

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**Quercetin**
Quercetin is a flavonoid found in various plant-based foods, including onion, kale, black tea, oranges, and blueberries. Quercetin supplementation has been shown to reduce the incidence and severity of upper respiratory tract infection (URTI) symptoms. Research suggests that a combination of vitamin C with quercetin may reduce oxidative stress and have additional immune-enhancing effects.

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**Vitamin C**
Vitamin C, found in dietary sources such as citrus, broccoli, and kiwi, plays an important role in immune function by supporting both innate and adaptive immune systems. Vitamin C deficiency may result in lowered immunity and a higher risk of infections. Supplementing with vitamin C has been shown to be effective in treating respiratory and systemic infections.

The recommended dietary allowances (RDAs) of vitamin C are:

* Birth to 6 months: 40 mg
* Infants 7-12 months: 50 mg
* Children 1-3 years: 15 mg
* Children 4-8 years: 25 mg
* Children 9-13 years: 45 mg
* Boys 14-18 years: 75 mg
* Girls 14-18 years: 65 mg
* Adult men: 90 mg
* Adult women: 75 mg

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**Vitamin D**
Vitamin D is a fat-soluble vitamin required in mineral metabolism, bone health, and immune function. Research suggests that vitamin D supplementation may support immune tolerance in autoimmune conditions and enhance the anti-microbial effect of certain immune cells.

The recommended dietary allowances (RDAs) of vitamin D are:

* Birth to 12 months: 400 IU
* Children 1-13 years: 600 IU
* Teens 14-18 years: 600 IU
* Adults 19-70 years: 600 IU
* Adults 71 years and older: 800 IU

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**Zinc**
The mineral zinc is commonly recommended to protect against the common cold. Zinc can be obtained in the diet from seafood, animal proteins, pumpkin seeds, yogurt, and cashews, as well as from dietary supplements. Research has found that zinc lozenges, when taken at the onset of a cold for a minimum of one to two weeks, may help reduce the symptoms and duration of colds in children and adults.

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