



GOOD Bite

at home

A nutrition fact sheet for parents and carers of children 0-5 years

Nutrition and Your Immune System

Individual immune responses vary largely due to genetics, environment, lifestyle, nutrition and interactions between these factors.

A healthy diet and good nutrition can **support** your immune system. While it is not the frontline of prevention and treatment of the common cold, flu or even Corona virus, good nutrition will influence how well you cope and recover from an illness.

Eating well to support your immune system

1. There's no one food that will boost your immune system but we know that Vitamins A, C and D and the minerals zinc, iron and selenium are all important. Eating a balanced diet including a variety of foods from the five core food groups will provide these important vitamins and minerals and contribute to maintaining your body's maximum disease fighting capability.

Good sources of these vitamins and minerals:

Vitamin A – eggs and oily fish (sardines, salmon, tuna and mackerel)

Vitamin C – fruits and vegetables, these also provide protective phytochemicals (antioxidants)

Vitamin D – oily fish, egg yolks, sunshine on your skin can also produce Vitamin D

Zinc – red meat, wholegrain breakfast cereals and milk products

Iron – red meat, wholegrain breads and cereals and legumes

Selenium – wholegrains, meat, oats and dairy products

There is no evidence that 'milk makes mucous'. Dairy milk has many benefits due to its supply of protein and carbohydrates along with the B vitamins, Vitamin A (in full cream milk) and Zinc.

2. Limit eating ultra-processed foods.

These are foods high in refined carbohydrates (sugars and refined grains) and fats, that don't offer much else in terms of nutrition. Examples include white flour, white rice, white pasta, sweet biscuits, chocolates, lollies, cakes, pastries, breakfast cereals high in added sugar, hot chips and many fast foods.

3. Feed your gut bacteria well

There are millions of bacteria that live in your digestive system. These bacteria play a much bigger role than just helping with the digestion of the food you eat. A healthy gut can help to fight off infections. Prebiotics, which are non-digestible types of dietary fibre that feed your gut bacteria, are considered to enhance immunity. Eating a diet high in fibre from plant-based foods will help to improve the richness and diversity of your gut bacteria.



Other lifestyle factors that impact your immune system

- **Sleep** – quality and quantity, if you don't get enough your immune system can be impaired
- **Exercise** – contributes to general good health and therefore to a healthy immune system
- **Stress management** – the stress response can suppress the immune system, increasing your weakness to colds and flu
- **Smoking** – children being exposed to second-hand smoke – makes them more prone to respiratory illnesses and more severe complications

Corona virus infection and food?

- There is no current evidence you can become infected by eating the corona virus. It's a respiratory virus transmitted mainly via nose and eyes, not a gastrointestinal virus. The acid in our stomach is expected to inactivate the virus.
- You don't need to wash uncooked foods like fruit and vegetables more than usual. Washing fruit and vegetables in fresh water just prior to eating is enough. Hand soap or dishwashing detergent are not designed for direct use on food.
- The best advice is to wash your hands with soap, before and frequently, when preparing food and handling food packaging. Washing your hands and not touching your face will minimise the risk of getting an infection after touching surfaces or food packaging.

Wash your hand thoroughly for at least 20 seconds.

Make sure you also completely dry your hands using paper towel or a single use hand towel.

For more information on food safety go to <https://www.csiro.au/en/Research/Health/Healthier-safer-foods/Food-safety>



Stuffed sweet potatoes

Sweet potato is a great source of beta-carotene which the body turns into vitamin A.

This recipe could be used for breakfast, lunch or dinner. Serves 4 - 6

Ingredients

- 4-6 medium-large sweet potatoes
- 500g lean mince
- 2 onions, diced
- 500g raw spinach
- ½ tsp garlic powder
- pinch of pepper
- 1 tbsp sage, chopped
- 1 tbsp basil, chopped
- ½ cup grated cheese
- ½ cup light sour cream (optional)



Method

Preheat the oven to 180°C.

Wrap sweet potatoes in foil and bake for 45-60 minutes until soft.

Meanwhile, cook the mince in a large frypan on medium heat. When almost browned, add the onion until soft, then add the spinach. Sauté until cooked, then add seasoning and spices to taste.

When the sweet potatoes are ready (and soft), remove from the oven and cut in half lengthwise. Spoon out some of the sweet potato from the middle of each sweet potato half and mix with the cooked mince stuffing mixture. Arrange the sweet potato halves in a large baking dish or on a baking tray. Add a big scoop of the stuffing mixture to the middle of each sweet potato.

Top with cheese and return to the oven for about 10 minutes to incorporate the flavours and melt cheese. Top with sour cream (if using) and serve.

Tip: You can use any kind of meat for the mince.

References

<https://examine.com/topics/coronavirus/>

<https://www.monash.edu/medicine/ccs/gastroenterology/prebiotic/faq#3>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27704207>

<https://foodandmoodcentre.com.au/2016/07/what-is-the-gut-microbiome/>

<https://www.pennutrition.com/KnowledgePathway.aspx?kpid=28198&trcatid=38&trid=28210>

Moir. C (April 2020) CSIROscope The wash-up on coronavirus and food, CSIRO



Contact Us!

This fact sheet is produced by the Central Coast Public Health/Community Nutrition Team. If you have any suggestions or nutrition topics you would like covered please contact us by telephone on 4320 3691 or fax on 4320 2828.