



Wellbeing NEWS



Have COVID-19 Pandemic Lockdowns Damaged Our Immune Systems?

🕒 August 3, 2021 👤 Lisa Baker, Editor, Wellbeing News



From 'Rainbow Foods' to nature's 'Health Wonders' – why our immune health is NOW a daily health essential like brushing our pearly whites

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With lockdown restrictions now significantly relaxed, wider mixing and living with COVID-19, are our immune systems primed and fit? Immune health has been on the tip of most people's tongues for the past 18 months and we have become well used to living with the new normal around COVID-19. However, caring for our immune health is an essential daily must have, just like brushing

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teeth twice daily. And the strength of immune health is directly related to the quality of our sleep, nutritional status, stress and how well we're looking after ourselves generally.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Consumption of low ultra-processed, generally lower nutrient foods, intake of which has increased during lockdowns, has been found to have a direct correlation to all-cause mortality^[1]. Low nutrient intake correlates to nutrient deficiencies of those essential for good immune function.
- Most Brits missing out on vital immune health nutrients – only 31% are eating fruit and veg several times a week and 69% wished their diet was healthier. That's according to Alive, makers of evidence backed vitamins and minerals for all life stages.^[2]
- Stress has become a massively negative factor in most people's lives during lockdown and there is widespread anxiety as we come out of lockdown among all age groups. Chronic stress causes corresponding changes to the body's immune function and increases damaging inflammation throughout the body^[3].
- Energy levels have also been severely impacted throughout the lockdown period, partly due to chronic stress, which negatively affects other homeostatic bodily processes^[4], especially glucose metabolism, leading into weight gain and even more anxiety.

TIME TO FIGHT-BACK – STARTING WITH VITAMIN D

New research^[5] recently released on vitamin D, found significantly low levels of 25OHD (vitamin D blood levels) and high levels of IL-6 (a key inflammatory marker), being independent predictors of COVID-19 severity and mortality. Researchers found that a significant number of people in their sample who were hospitalised had remarkably low levels of vitamin D. The researchers concluded that given the lack of safety concerns on vitamin D and the low cost of supplementation, vitamin D therapy might reduce the risk of respiratory failure in patients with SARS-CoV-2 infection.

Plus, a recent literature revision from the UK Government Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) concluded there may be some benefit from taking a daily vitamin D3 supplement to reduce the risk of acute respiratory tract infections. Try Alive! Vitamin D3 Gummies which contain 50 µg of vitamin D3 per dose as well as Calcium and Phosphorus, or Nature's Way Vitamin D3 High Strength 50µg Chocolate Chewable one-a-day tablets.

Clearly, the immune system needs to be protecting us against everything that life throws and not just COVID-19. Coughs, cold and infections are going to become more widespread over the coming months and especially into the autumn period, the traditional time for seasonal colds and flu. Eating a varied diet, prioritising sleep, eating fermented foods to support gut health, keeping alcohol intake to a minimum and reducing overall sugar intake are all key for protecting the immune system. It's now we need to be thinking about this before we hit the autumn months.

DAILY IMMUNE ESSENTIALS

We certainly can't be leaving anything to chance right now and what we put into the body directly correlates to how robust the immune system responds. Off the menu (or significantly reduced) is sugar in all its forms (including honey). Although glucose is needed for proper function of the immune system, too much is certainly not good^[6].

Try to base your diet around low glycaemic foods including whole grains, beans, lentil, nuts and seeds, with good amounts of

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protein at every meal. Natural sugars in fruits and vegetables provide sufficient carbohydrate for the body and brain whereas refined sugars found in cakes and biscuits, upset blood sugar balance and negatively affect immune function.

A wealth of vitamins and minerals play a key role in immune function, specifically selenium, zinc, iron and vitamins A, B6, C, D and E, all of which are at risk of deficiency in both adults and children. A daily multivitamin and mineral supplement, which also provides a blend of 26 fruits and vegetables such as Alive! Ultra Wholefood Plus, provides the perfect top-up and health insurance policy to build robust immune health. And for all the family, from 3 years, there is Alive! Immune Support Gummies which, in addition to the unique blend of 26 fruits and vegetables, also include vitamins A, B6, C, D, Zinc and black elderberry – nutrients that are all synonymous with immune health.

SELF-CARE FOR SUPER IMMUNITY

Good nutrition is, of course, the cornerstone to wellness. However, a key part of protecting immune health is how we care for the body generally. Poor sleep has been an issue for a vast swathe of the population during lockdown, and adversely affects immune health^[7]. Eating foods containing tryptophan in the evening, an amino acid which produces serotonin our sleep hormone can really help improve sleep. Great bedtime snacks are oatcakes with hummus, a mug of warmed milk (dairy or soya), some natural yoghurt or a small bowl of porridge oats, to really help get some all-important 'shut-eye'.

Anxiety can be debilitating for many people. It's amazingly just how beneficial deep breathing can be for calming the body and mind because it literally resets the autonomic nervous system^[8]. Something as simple as taking five minutes when you first wake up to breathe five seconds in and five seconds out (5-5-5) can be a game-changer. And for people who find that meditation takes too much practice, deep breathing is as effective.

Valerian root, often referred to as "nature's Valium" is a herb that has been used since ancient times to promote tranquillity and improve sleep^[9]. Sleep is vital to how our bodies function during waking hours. Plus, a lack of sleep can weaken your immune system. Combining Valerian and Passionflower, Bonuit Sleep Aid is a traditional herbal medicine for the relief of sleep disturbances such as helping people to go to sleep more quickly and sustain quality sleep cycles.

GERANIUM UP YOUR HEALTH

With immunity top of the priority list, it's time to take a closer look at the herb Pelargonium which is directly related to the Geranium family. Specifically, the unique extract EPs® 7630 has been extensively and robustly researched over the last 25 years. Sold in the UK as Kaloba®, the product contains EPs® 7630 and it is now the best researched phyto-medicine in cough and cold worldwide. In double-blind trials of more than 10,000 people, including more than 4,500 children, Kaloba has proved its efficacy. Kaloba has a triple mode of action being anti-viral, anti-bacterial and mucolytic. A recent study^[10] found cold symptoms significantly reduced in the treatment groups. In cases of COPD, treatment with Kaloba as an add-on showed more pronounced improvements than those taking placebo at week 24^[11].

Kaloba Pelargonium Cough & Cold Relief is available in oral drops, tablet and sugar-free syrup, plus children from the age of 6 years can take this formulation as well as those people suffering from asthma.

The immune system can't just be 'ramped up' when we remember to do it. Both adults and children are going to be especially vulnerable to colds and infections because the immune system hasn't had to deal with them for a while. However, taking preventative action now and knowing there is also an effective treatment available should allow us all to better enjoy our freedoms".

Suzie's five top foods to super-charge your immunity with rainbow foods:

1. **Avocados:** Rich in monounsaturated fats needed to absorb our immune-boosting fat-soluble vitamins A, D and E. Healthy fats are used to help bust inflammation and manage immune response. Plus avocados are loaded with immune-boosting vitamin E in their own right. Crushed avocados on wholemeal toast are a great way to start the day!
2. **Mushrooms:** One of the few foods able to deliver meaningful levels of the immune-boosting vitamin D, and raw seem to contain the most amounts. Chop mushrooms up and add to salads or dip into some delicious hummus, for a great snack.
3. **Natural yoghurt:** It may seem strange but so much of what happens with the immune system stems from the gut. The gut microbiome (friendly bacteria) are responsible for so much that is good, so bolster them up with some natural yoghurt which is naturally fermented and contains live strains. Berries rich in vitamin C, make the perfect accompaniment. And talking of vitamin C



Red peppers: Containing some of the highest levels of immune-boosting vitamin C, red peppers are great in stir fries, 4. chopped and eaten raw as crudités or roasted with a tray of other colourful veggies. Alternatively, try cooking oven-baked red pepper risotto, <https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/oven-baked-red-pepper-risotto> an easy version of the Italian rice dish, with none of the stirring. The leftovers are great too! Vitamin C helps uprate production of white blood cells, an essential function of the immune system.

5. **Eggs:** One of the best sources of protein as they contain all essential amino acids, eggs make a great start to anyone's day! Protein is needed to produce antibodies and other cells which all pull together in getting the immune system into great shape.

PRODUCT RECOMMENDATIONS

- Alive! Vitamin D3 Gummies 60s – from £12.99 – Holland & Barrett and www.feelaliveuk.com
- Nature's Way Vitamin D3 High Strength 50µg Chocolate Chewable Tablets 90s – from £9.99 – www.natures-way.com
- Alive! Ultra Wholefood plus range 60s – from £20 – Holland & Barrett and www.feelaliveuk.com
- Alive! Immune Support Gummies 60s – from £12.99 – Boots, Holland & Barrett, Ocado and www.feelaliveuk.com
- Bonuit Sleep Aid 30s – from £8.50 – Boots, Holland & Barrett and www.bonuit.co.uk
- Kaloba Pelargonium Cough & Cold relief range – from £6.80 – Boots, Holland & Barrett and www.kaloba.co.uk

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