GMHC’S Nutrition & Wellness Program

THE IMMUNE SYSTEM

WHAT IS THE IMMUNE SYSTEM?

The immune system is a group of organs and cells that defend the body against infection, disease and foreign substances. It keeps you healthy and strong.

NUTRITION & THE IMMUNE SYSTEM

Because HIV attacks the immune system you want to make sure you keep it as strong as possible. You can do that by eating a healthy diet!

Food provides you with many of the nutrients you need to maintain a healthy body. A healthy balance of all nutrients helps support the immune system.

CARBOHYDRATES

Carbohydrates supply the immune system with energy so that it can work better and fight disease.

Increase whole grain complex carbohydrates, such as:
- Whole-wheat bread
- Brown rice
- Whole-wheat pasta
- Grains like whole-wheat couscous, quinoa, barley
- Cereals like oatmeal, shredded wheat, bran cereals

Limit simple sugars, such as:
- White and brown sugar, honey
- Candy
- Malta
- Soda

Limit processed carbs, such as:
- White bread products
- Cakes, cookies, pies

PROTEINS

Proteins make enzymes, which help the immune cells kill germs, viruses and bacteria. They also help maintain your muscle mass.

Choose lean meats
- White meat turkey
- Lean pork (ham)
- White meat chicken
- Lean red meats
- Fish

Choose plant proteins
- Nuts and beans
- Peanut butter
- Tofu and other soy products

Limit high fat meats
- Take the skin off chicken
- Trim the fat off steak and pork
- Limit bacon, sausage, salami and ground beef
FATS

Fats are necessary for the body and immune system to work properly. They serve as fuel for the immune cells.

Choose Omega-3 fats, such as:
- Cold water fish like, salmon, mackerel, herring, halibut, albacore tuna, anchovies, trout and sardines
- Flaxseeds oil, canola oil (cold pressed oils are best)
- Walnuts, flaxseeds, pumpkin seeds, soybeans and tofu

Limit Saturated Fats:
- Choose lean sources of saturated fat such as chicken (without skin), low-fat dairy, lean cuts of beef and pork
- Avoid coconut oil, palm oil and hydrogenated vegetable oils (Crisco).

OTHER NUTRIENTS THAT ENHANCE THE IMMUNE SYSTEM

Phytochemicals, vitamins and minerals are substances found in plant foods that help to boost the immune system.

Add color to your plate
- Increase your fruit and vegetable intake to 3 – 5 per day
- Choose dark green vegetables, such as spinach, kale, collards and mustard greens.
- Choose cruciferous vegetables like broccoli, cabbage and Brussels sprouts
- Go for vibrant reds, yellow and oranges by choosing foods like red and yellow peppers, oranges, watermelons, oranges and squash

Add spice to your food
- Use onions, leeks, shallots and garlic
- Use herbs such as oregano, basil, thyme, rosemary and dill to add flavor and nutrients to your food.