Flu-Fighting Foods: Keep Your Immune System Healthy This Flu Season

The flu season is here, and good nutrition is more important than ever. Because your immune system is already dealing with HIV, fighting off the flu is more difficult. If your immune system is not getting the nutrients it needs to function properly, a common cold could turn into pneumonia or another serious medical condition.

Eating the right foods can help you keep your immune system strong. It can help decrease the progression of HIV disease, but most importantly, eating a healthy balanced diet with good variety might help protect you from getting the flu and may even help you fight it off faster.

So, which nutrients are the most important for immunity? Here are a few key nutrients:

- **Vitamin C** may increase the production of white blood cells, which helps our bodies fight off viruses and bacteria. It also increases the levels of interferon, an antibody that coats cells, surfaces, which may prevent viruses from entering them. You can find vitamin C in red peppers, strawberries, oranges, lemons, Brussels sprouts, broccoli, collard greens, grapefruit and cantaloupe.

- **Vitamin E** is an antioxidant that stimulates the production of natural killer cells, called lymphocytes, that seek out and destroy germs. It is also an antioxidant that helps protect our cells. You can find vitamin E in hazelnuts, sunflower seeds, peanuts, brazil nuts, corn, peanuts, almonds, safflower oil and corn oil.

- **Beta-Carotene and other carotenoids** may help increase the production of natural killer cells and helper T-cells. They also act as powerful antioxidants. A lot of research shows that deficiency of beta-carotene and other carotenoids have been observed in multiple HIV+ adults. You can find these compounds in carrots, green leafy veggies, asparagus, broccoli, peppers and berries.

- **Glutamine** can enhance the function of immune cells, specifically white blood cells, and cells known as neutrophils, which kill bacteria. You can find glutamine in beef, chicken, fish, eggs and milk.

- **Arginine** enhances the production of nitric oxide in the body, which is a compound that appears to have the ability to reduce and impair the abilities of certain bacteria or germs. Foods that contain arginine include peanuts, walnuts, brazil nuts, coconut, milk and animal products, cereals and chocolate.

And finally, remember that keeping your hands clean is the best way to avoid getting sick and spreading our germs to others!

So now you know what to eat, but you also need to know what not to eat. Eating too much refined sugar can take a toll on our bodies, and eating too much saturated fat appears to affect the ability of white blood cells to multiply. Also, certain habits can weaken our immune system. Drinking more than 1 or 2 alcoholic drinks a day appears to decrease the activity of white blood cells (one serving is: 12 fl oz beer, 4 fl oz wine, or 1.5 oz of distilled liquor, such as rum, vodka or whiskey).

So, you’ve heard it a million times before, but we’ll say it again: eat a variety of foods including lots of fruits and vegetables, wash your hands regularly to keep your immune system healthy & strong so that it is always ready to wage war on germs.

**Sources**


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Spice of the Quarter: Turmeric

Whenever I visit Penzey’s Spice store in Grand Central Terminal, I get a little overwhelmed. My eyes often glaze over from the never ending spice selection; Allspice, Juniper Berries, Mulling Spice... Oh my! However, there is a spice that will save me from inevitable epicurean demise. The vibrant orange color of turmeric powder awakens my senses. If you’ve never cooked with turmeric, I highly recommend it. Adding it into your rice can turn a dull Friday into a trip to the forests of Malaysia. Ok, maybe that’s a stretch, but it looks pretty.

Turmeric is responsible for the red orangey color of curry and is found in many Indian, South Asian, and Middle Eastern dishes. The root was, and probably still is, used as a fabric dye for brightly colored festive garments. Turmeric (curcuma longa) is a relative of ginger, and while the root can be eaten, the more common form of consumption is prepared by boiling, baking, and then grinding into a powder.

Turmeric was once used in Chinese and Ayurvedic medicine as an antiseptic, anti itch, and anti-inflammatory agent. Recently, turmeric has received some attention for the presence of a chemical curcumin. Curcumin has recently been studied as a possible anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and anti-cancer agent. Many of the studies conducted on curcumin are inconclusive, and there are currently no recommendations for its use in cancer treatments.

Even though turmeric is considered safe, there are always precautions when considering adding an herbal supplement to your medication regimen. Individuals suffering from gastric ulcers, bile duct obstructions, gallstones, or acid reflux should not take turmeric. It has also been known to interact with antplatelet drugs and regular aspirin.

Turmeric is readily available in natural food stores in capsule, tea, or tincture form. Regular dosing ranges are 0.5-1 gram daily before meals, and one should never take more than 3g a day. Consider adding turmeric to your recipes similar to the one listed below. This can be a natural way to incorporate curcumin into our regimen as opposed to an extract at higher concentrations in supplements. If nothing else you will impress your friends with you adventurous culinary skills and consideration of their health and well being. This is a grilled chicken recipe that incorporates turmeric. I decided to use this recipe because not everyone is a fan of 20 ingredient curry dishes. It’s quick, easy, and can be started a day ahead. (See The Recipe on the Back)
Fruit of the Quarter: Persimmons

Fall is a perfect time of year for a Persimmon. Persimmons, once called the “fruit of the Gods”, are in season from October through December, reaching the peak of their season in November. They look like a cross between a pumpkin and a tomato, ranging in color from a yellow-orange to a deep red-orange. They are commonly described as “crisp like an apple, sweet like a pear”. In a poem entitled Persimmons, Li-Young Lee wrote “Some things never leave a person: scent of the hair of the one you love, & the texture of persimmons, in your palm, the ripe weight.”

Persimmon Primer

Persimmons are originally from Japan and China, but are now seen all over the world. Technically, a persimmon is a berry. In the United States, many different varieties of Persimmons are grown, but the most popular varieties are the Hachiya and the Fuyu. The Hachiya is the most common, accounting for 90% of the fruit on the market. It is shaped like an acorn. This variety must be consumed when ripe, (it’s ripe when it’s squishy like a water balloon). The unripe Hachiya has a lot of tannin, which gives the fruit a very astringent quality and sour taste that will surely make you pucker. In fact, the literal translation of the word Persimmon is “a dry fruit”. The Fuyu, (resembling a miniature pumpkin) on the other hand, has less tannin, and can be eaten right away. They are sold at fruit markets, some bodegas and grocery stores.

The How (and Why) to Eat a Persimmon

Eating a persimmon is easy: eat it fresh. The whole fruit is edible except for the “calyx” (see picture). Persimmons can also be consumed dried, or even baked into cookies, breads, cakes, puddings and salads. It is an excellent source of Beta Carotene (Vitamin A), Vitamin C, and fiber. A more tannic fruit was once used to treat constipation and other gastrointestinal problems. It is a great source of fiber, which can help alleviate constipation and keep your stomach and intestines happy and healthy.

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 1 medium Persimmon (168 g)

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*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your Daily Values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.

Persimmon and Apple Salad

Makes 6 servings
Each serving equals 1/2 cup of fruit or vegetables

Ingredients

| 1 Tbsp walnut pieces, toasted |
| 2 Tbsp orange juice |
| 1 Tbsp sherry vinegar |
| 1 Tbsp olive oil |
| 3 sweet variety apples, rinsed, cored, and thinly sliced lengthwise |
| 3 firm-ripe Fuyu persimmons, rinsed, stemmed, and thinly sliced lengthwise |

Method

In a bowl, combine orange juice, vinegar, and olive oil. Add apples, persimmons, and toasted walnuts and mix to coat. Nutritional analysis per serving: Calories 90, Protein 0g, Fat 3g, Calories From Fat 29%, Cholesterol 0mg, Carbohydrates 16g, Fiber 3g, Sodium 15mg.

Source: http://www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov/month/persimmons.html

Chicken with Tumeric Marinade

Marinade:

- 8 skinless leg-thigh chicken pieces
- 1/4 cup coarsely chopped garlic
- 1 bunch cilantro chopped (incorporate stems and leaves)
- 1 teaspoon ground turmeric
- 1 teaspoon curry powder (can be acquired at most grocery stores)
- 1 teaspoon ground cayenne pepper *
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 3 tablespoons Thai fish sauce (can be acquired at most grocery stores)
- 1 cup plain yogurt
- 1 14 oz can light coconut milk, for basting

Directions:

In a mixing bowl add garlic, cilantro, turmeric, curry, cayenne, sugar, salt, fish sauce, and yogurt. Stir to combine, and add chicken to coat. Add chicken and marinade to a large Ziploc bag, seal and refrigerate overnight. Prepare grill to medium-high heat and grill chicken over hot coals until done, brushing frequently with coconut milk.

Garnish chicken with chopped cilantro leaves; serve alongside basmati rice and a bright refreshing green salad.

If you would like to schedule a nutrition counselling appointment, please call:
Margaret Swift, RD at 212-367-1263 OR
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