

Optimize Effective Immune Responses to Infection



Pulling the levers of lifestyle medicine may reduce severity and improve biological immune responses to infections.

Mind Your Stress

Pause. Take a few seconds to consider your breathing, listen to a favorite song, or watch a funny video. The stress hormone, cortisol, suppresses some immune responses to viral infections. Being mindful, even in small doses, reduces stress and as a result, cortisol production.



No Smoking

Avoid smoking, vaping, or inhaling any substance, which can damage lung tissue and enable viral infections.

Healthy Eating

What you eat makes all the difference! To arm your immune system with the micronutrients it needs to effectively fight infections, consume a wide array of fiber-filled, nutrient-dense, and antioxidant-rich whole plant foods at every meal. Choose a rainbow of fruits and vegetables, eat your beans, consume whole grains, and use a variety of herbs and spices to enhance flavors. Stay hydrated with water!



Activity

Regular, moderate physical activity is vital to keeping the immune system healthy! While Physical Activity Guidelines recommend at least 30 minutes, 5 days a week, as little as 20 minutes can reduce inflammation and support effective immune responses to infection.



Quality Sleep

Aim to sleep for 7 to 9 hours. Develop a routine: Set an alarm for when to go to sleep and when to wake up. Make sure your room is cool, dark, quiet, and comfortable. Avoid screens at least 90 minutes before bedtime. Practice a "wind down" ritual, like listening to soft music, writing in a journal, or reading a book.



Connectivity

Physical distancing is essential when contagious disease risks are high, but not at the expense of being isolated or lonely. Connect with friends and family via FaceTime, Zoom sessions, texting, and phone calls. Positive emotions, which are shown to improve cellular immune responses, arise from even brief, virtual social connections.



Increasing your body's immune response is not a guarantee against infection.

