

GET SMART Newsletter

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Eat Healthy, Stay Healthy

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Maintaining a strong immune system is one of the best ways to keep you and your family healthy during this cold and flu season. When your immune system is weak, it's harder to fight off illnesses. The good news is that there are simple steps you can take to stay healthy. One of the best ways is to eat a healthy diet. A truly healthy immune system is developed by a balanced mix of vitamins and minerals. With some exceptions, eating vitamin-rich foods, instead of taking a pill supplement, is all you need.

Here is a rundown of five vitamin and mineral powerhouses:

- **Vitamin A** has an antioxidant effect that fights infection. The body converts the highly colorful carotenoids found in food into vitamin A. Orange-colored fruits and vegetables are rich in vitamin A. They include carrots, sweet potatoes, pumpkin, cantaloupe and squash.
- **Vitamin B6** is critical to a properly functioning immune system. Bananas, lean chicken breast, tuna, baked potatoes and chickpeas are great source of vitamin B6.



- **Vitamin C** is an immune system booster found in more than just citrus fruits. Bell peppers, Brussels sprouts, strawberries, papaya and leafy green vegetables, such as spinach or kale, are excellent sources of vitamin C.
- **Vitamin E** is a powerful antioxidant that protects against and fights off infection. Foods rich in vitamin E include almonds, peanuts, hazelnuts, sunflower seeds, spinach and broccoli.
 - **Zinc** controls inflammation and appears to slow down the immune response. Foods rich in zinc include oysters, crab, lean meats, poultry, yogurt and chickpeas.

In addition to eating a healthy diet, you can boost your immune system by practicing good hygiene, getting adequate sleep and regular physical activity, and not smoking.

Following a healthy lifestyle may be the single best step you can take for a healthy immune system. This will protect against chronic disease like diabetes, obesity, some types of cancer and heart disease.

About the Author:

Heather Tressler is a registered dietitian with more than 17 years of experience in a wide variety of health care settings, including hospital, worksite and community, reaching both adults and children. Heather earned her Bachelor of Science in Dietetics and Nutrition from Immaculata University and Master of Health Education at the Pennsylvania State University. She also attained the Master Certified Health Education Specialist (MCHES) certification and she is a Licensed Dietitian in the state of PA.

Dietary Guidelines for Americans: 2016 Update

Kathleen Hiltwine, public health nutrition consultant, Division of Food and Nutrition, Pennsylvania Department of Education

In January 2016, the [2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) report was released. The **Dietary Guidelines for Americans** is updated every five years by the U.S. departments of Agriculture and Health and Human Services. It provides nutritional and dietary information and guidelines to the public, helping Americans two years and older eat a healthy, well-balanced diet.

The 2015-2020 report instructs Americans to:

- **Follow a healthy eating pattern.** Choose a healthy eating pattern to help achieve and maintain a healthy body weight, support good nutrition and reduce the risk of chronic disease.
- **Focus on variety, nutrient density and amount.** Choose a variety of nutrient-dense foods from all food groups in the recommended amounts.
- **Limit calories from added sugars and saturated fats, and reduce sodium intake.** Eat foods and beverages that are low in added sugars, saturated fats and sodium.
- **Focus on healthier food and beverage choices.** Choose nutrient-dense foods and beverages from all food groups instead of less healthy options.
- **Support healthy eating patterns for all.** Support individuals and families in making healthy dietary choices.

What does a healthy eating pattern look like? An eating pattern is the combination of foods and beverages that create an individual's diet. Because eating patterns are the result of choices made on multiple eating events, there is plenty of opportunity to make healthy choices!

The 2015-2020 report highlights that a healthy eating pattern should ...

Include	Limit
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A variety of vegetables from all sub-groups (e.g., dark green, red and orange, legumes, starchy and other)• Fruits, especially whole fruits• Grains, at least half of which are whole grains• Fat-free or low-fat dairy, including milk, yogurt, cheese and/or fortified soy beverages• A variety of protein foods, including seafood, lean meats and poultry, eggs, legumes, nuts, seeds and soy products• Oils, such as canola or olive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Added sugars, such as those found in sweetened beverages and some breakfast cereals• Saturated fats, such as those found in red meat, butter and full-fat cheeses• Trans fats found naturally in some animal products and processed foods• Food and beverages high in sodium

Healthy eating patterns differ for everyone. Set a good example for the young children in your family by adopting a healthy eating pattern of your own. Have fun by introducing new fruits and vegetables and combining healthy choices from all food groups while building well-balanced meals. The combinations of healthy foods are endless!

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