

# Strengthen your immune system by kicking these defense-impairing habits

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Faced with the threat of a pandemic in the midst of the COVID-19, the world is in panic over how to prevent infection and its massive spread. Recommendations on what to do are every where causing much confusion. Hand washing and reduction of exposure are our first line of defense against infection. Taking supplements under the supervision of your dietitian and physician may help boost immunity. Eating functional food that has health benefits beyond basic nutrition may increase immunity. You might be, however, unconsciously doing things, that are counter acting your efforts in boosting your immune system. Think of the immune system as the military force inside your body. It protects you from the threat of invaders and it defends you from invaders in the form of viruses and pathogenic bacteria. Left with a weak immune system, your body is rendered help less from infection. Here are three habits that hurt your immune system.

- **Staying up late due to unproductive activities**— We have all been guilty of endlessly watching movies and engaging in social media the entire night. We get so engrossed that we end up with very little sleep or none at all. Lack of sleep not only depresses your immune system. It also impacts the rate of your recovery from infection. Have you ever wondered why you get drowsy when you are down with flu? It is your body's natural way of healing because when you sleep, the body produces cytokines. These are proteins needed to fight infection and inflammation.

- **Eating junk food**—Processed food high in refined sugars and unhealthy fats is considered empty calorie foods. They are indeed calorie rich yet contain no beneficial nutrients. Studies have shown that the body's immune system reacts to high fat and high caloric diet the same way it reacts to bacterial infection. When there is an "invader" in the form of refined sugars and transfat, the body's defense system overreacts. When this happens quite often, the immune system continues to fight back. Thus putting the body in a state of inflammation, attacking the healthy cells in the absence of actual invaders.

- **Wallowing in negativity**— Stress, whether physical, mental, or emotional, can make you ill. It will cause your body to produce pro-inflammatory hormones like cortisol, which inhibits proper immune response. We may not be able to to tally avoid stress but it pays to choose your battles. Stay away from what disturbs your inner peace. Have nothing to do with gossip, toxic social media posts, or opinions of people that do not matter in your life. Embrace positivity. When ever you feel negative emotions creeping in, think of the things that you are grateful for. Pray, do mindful breathing, and channel your negative emotions into productive activities. Handwashing and reduction of exposure are our first line of defense against infection. Taking supplements under the supervision of your dietitian and physician may help boost immunity. Modifying the behaviors mentioned will not only decrease your chances of infection from COVID-19. They will make your immune system healthier to protect you against getting sick in general.

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