# Boosting your immune system

Lifestyle factors and habits can affect our ability to fight infections and maintain good health, writes

New Straits Times · 9 Mar 2021 · 18 · Meera Murugesan

NEVER has the focus on staying healthy and preventing illnesses been greater than it is now. us appreciate the value of good health and how fragile life can be.



"Be sure to include quality food in your daily meals. Include foods that contain antioxidants, different minerals and vitamins," says Ryan.

Exercise is also crucial. The recommended duration is 30 minutes daily for adults and 60 minutes for children.

Binge-eating is common among individuals grappling with changes in their lives.

Nutritionist Yap Fui Fong says that when people are confined to their homes for a prolonged period of time, stress and boredom set in. These emotions will cause production of stress hormones that will trigger a craving for high-calorie, high-sugar comfort food.

Ordering take-out too often can also be detrimental to overall health. Meals from commercial food outlets tend to have low nutritional value but a high fat, sodium and sugar content.

"Regularly consuming such food can cause malnutrition which results in a low immune system, lack of energy and a foggy mind as well as slow healing of wounds and weight gain," says Yap

Maintaining health and wellness means strengthening the immune system. While it is everyone's goal, there are no shortcuts to achieving this.The pandemic has made

Here are some ways to do it:

DRINK ENOUGH WATER

Staying hydrated is an essential part of maintaining a healthy immune system. Most of us don't drink enough water, even when we are working from home because we are too busy multi-tasking.

To function properly, all cells and organs in the body need water. It is essential for the kidneys and other bodily functions.

Blood, which carries oxygen to different parts of the body, is also more than 90 per cent water, so good hydration is essential.

Water also helps the body eliminate toxins and bacteria which is why we are told to drink more of it when we are ill.

Keep a bottle of water at your workstation at all times. Ensure you drink at least eight glasses of water a day.

EAT RIGHT AND EXERCISE

Lockdowns and Movement Control Orders have thrown our lives in a loop, leading to sudden changes in routine.

Having constant access to our favourite snacks while working from home can lead to overeating, instead of healthy eating to build a strong immune system, says Herbalife Nutrition's director of sports performance, nutrition and education, Dr Dana Ryan.

"Be sure to include quality food in your daily meals. Include foods that contain antioxidants, different minerals and vitamins," says Ryan.

Exercise is also crucial. The recommended duration is 30 minutes daily for adults and 60 minutes for children.

BACK OFF FROM BINGE-EATING

Binge-eating is common among individuals grappling with changes in their lives.

Nutritionist Yap Fui Fong says that when people are confined to their homes for a prolonged period of time, stress and boredom set in. These emotions will cause production of stress hormones that will trigger a craving for high-calorie, high-sugar comfort food.

Ordering take-out too often can also be detrimental to overall health. Meals from commercial food outlets tend to have low nutritional value but a high fat, sodium and sugar content.

"Regularly consuming such food can cause malnutrition which results in a low immune system, lack of energy and a foggy mind as well as slow healing of wounds and weight gain," says Yap

MANAGE STRESS

Nothing wears a person down, both physically and emotionally, like prolonged stress. It has a long-term impact on health and well-being.

Research has shown that highly-stressed individuals fall sick more often, take a longer time to recover and generally have poorer quality of life.

Lakshmi Menon, nutritionist and Qualitas Medical Group's head of business development, says the pandemic has taken a toll on mental well-being, even leading to hormonal changes.

During stressful times like these, our body produces a hormone called cortisol, she explains. Cortisol spurs our desire to eat. Bingeeating becomes a way to cope with stress and anxiety. Cortisol also alters immune system responses. Elevated levels of the hormone can impact the effectiveness of the immune system.

SLEEP WELL

Sleep and a healthy immune system are closely related. Sleep deprivation affects the ability to fight off illnesses. Good quality sleep keeps the immune system working as it should.

Research shows that the risk of infections is higher among people who sleep less than six or seven hours a night or those suffering from persistent sleep problems.

In a 2017 study published in Behavioral Sleep Medicine, it was found that young healthy adults suffering from insomnia were more susceptible to the flu despite getting vaccinated compared to healthy adults with no sleep problems.

Sleep is the process by which the body rests and repairs cells that have been damaged.

With working from home now the norm, working hours often extend into rest or sleep time, disrupting sleeping patterns for many.

It's important to stick to a proper sleep routine to maintain overall health.

While some people may function well with less sleep than others, generally a normal adult needs about seven hours of sleep a night.

MAINTAIN GOOD HYGIENE

Keeping things clean is the first line of defence against infections.

Good hygiene protects us, whether it's washing our hands regularly, thoroughly cleansing fruits and vegetables prior to consumption, or ensuring our living space is free of dust and pollutants.

It's equally important to ensure wounds of any sort are cleaned and bandaged and, if necessary, treated by a doctor to prevent infections.

Some habits are best ditched if one is concerned about staying healthy, more so during a pandemic.

Smoking and over-consumption of alcohol have been shown to have a detrimental effect on the immune system.

meera@mediaprima.com.my Sources: mayoclinic.org, medicalnewstoday.com, health-line.com, every

dayhealth.com, health.harvard.edu