

## FOOD AND DRINK THAT WILL HELP YOU STAY WELL

Daily Mail · 15 Oct 2024 · 30 · DR EMILY LEEMING DIETITIAN AND SCIENTIST

GOOD nutrition helps strengthen the immune system, making it more effective at fighting off infections. These are the foods and drinks that science shows can really make a difference.

**BLACK BEANS:** A healthy gut microbiome, the community of tiny organisms that live in your gut, is essential for defending against infections – and one of the best ways to support it is by eating plant foods, rich in fibre as well as polyphenols, which give fruit and veg their colour and that feed your ‘good’ gut bacteria. Black beans are packed with both. Blend them into a dip, add to stews, pastas and soups. **MUSHROOMS:** During the colder months, it’s hard to get enough immune-supporting vitamin D (our bodies manufacture it via exposure to the sun’s UV light), which is why the NHS advises taking a supplement from October to March. You can further boost your vitamin D levels with mushrooms – and exposing them to UV light means they produce more vitamin D.

Even in winter, leaving mushrooms by a sunny window gill-side up for two hours can significantly boost their vitamin D, reported the journal *Nutrients* in 2018.

**FERMENTED FOODS:** A 2021 study in the journal *Cell* found that six servings of fermented foods a day boosted the diversity of the participants’ gut microbiome (a sign of a healthy gut) and lowered markers of inflammation – which should help your body fend off colds or flu. Even having one or two fermented foods a day is likely to help. Try yoghurt, kefir, kombucha, beet kvass (a sparkling fermented drink), sauerkraut and cottage cheese. **GARLIC:** In a 2001 study participants who took a daily supplement of allicin – the active ingredient in garlic – for three months over winter had fewer colds and recovered faster than those who didn’t, reported the journal *Advances in Therapy*. As raw garlic contains more allicin than cooked, blend it into pesto or add it to dressings for maximum benefits.

**BLUEBERRIES:** A review in 2016 in the journal *Advances in Nutrition* found that eating flavonoids – compounds found in blueberries, dark chocolate and parsley – was linked to a 33 per cent lower risk of respiratory infections such as colds and flu. Flavonoids protect immune cells from damage and help them communicate with each other. **GREEN TEA:** Tea is rich in catechins, powerful antioxidants, which may explain why drinking it (green or black) regularly is linked to a 30 per cent lower risk of catching a cold or flu, reported the *European Journal of Nutrition* in 2021.

**ORANGES:** High in vitamin C, which supports the immune system. One orange provides most of your daily needs, but you’ll get the same amount from half a cup of orange juice or one kiwi.