

Immunity Support on Your Plate

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

If you've read a headline that mentions *immune boosting*, don't believe the hype.

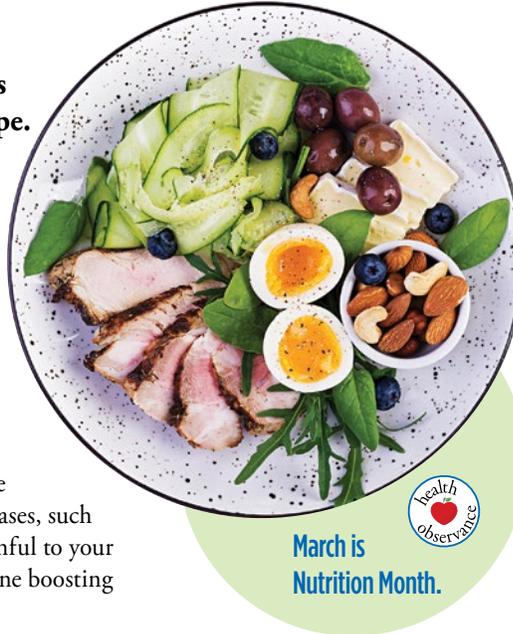
The idea of boosting the immune system with supplements or specific ingredients is misleading and scientifically inaccurate.

There are many things we can do to keep our immune system running smoothly, such as getting enough sleep, being physically active, minimizing stress and eating a balanced diet. But boosting immunity implies heightened action, which should be avoided — an overactive immune system is linked with autoimmune diseases, such as lupus or multiple sclerosis, and is equally harmful to your health as an underactive immune system. Immune boosting is a marketing term, not a medical term.

Let's focus on supporting your immune system instead. Certain nutrients, including zinc, iron, selenium, protein and omega-3 fats, as well as vitamins C, D and E, are critical for the growth and function of immune cells. Build meals with a variety of foods to get the nutrients your body needs.

- 1. Get extra vegetables and fruit.** They should fill half of your plate at every meal. Fresh, frozen and canned are all great choices.
- 2. Add protein from fish, chicken, dairy, tofu or beans.** The building blocks of protein (amino acids) are essential for T-cell function, which protects the body against bacteria and viruses.
- 3. Choose nuts and seeds.** Include Brazil nuts for selenium; walnuts and flax for omega-3 fats; pumpkin seeds for zinc; and almonds or sunflower seeds for vitamin E.
- 4. Enjoy fermented foods.** Yogurt, kefir and fermented vegetables — such as sauerkraut or kimchi — contain probiotics, which may be linked to a strong immune system.
- 5. Look for vitamin D.** It's found in fish, milk, fortified plant-based beverages and eggs. If you don't eat any of these foods or get much sun, consider asking your health care provider to check your blood levels. You may need a vitamin D supplement.

It's also important to minimize highly processed foods, such as soft drinks, candy, fast food and salty snacks. These foods lack nutrients and can impair the production of immune cells and antibodies.



BEST bits

 **Colon cancer screening can be a lifesaver.** With early detection and treatment, the death rate for this disease has declined, but it is still a common form of cancer. The American Cancer Society recommends people at average risk start screening at age 45. Screening for colon cancer can easily be done using stool tests that look for blood or DNA changes. Or a health care provider can look inside the colon and rectum using colonoscopy, sigmoidoscopy or CT colonography to detect any polyps or cancer. Your provider will recommend which test is best based on your risk factors. During **Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month**, learn more at fightcolorectalcancer.org.

 **March 1 is Baby Sleep Day,** sponsored by the Pediatric Sleep Council, which offers support for families wanting to develop healthy sleep habits for their babies. When babies sleep well, their parents feel rested, too, and enjoy life more. Learn more about sleep in young children at babysleep.com.

 **Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Awareness Week is March 14 to 21.** This complicated autoimmune disease affects the central nervous system. As well as pain, disability, anxiety and depression, MS can cause many physical disorders affecting mobility, walking, balance, speech, swallowing and bladder and bowel function. Symptom remissions and flare-ups can occur. Learn what's new in MS research at mymsaa.org.

Note: Due to production lead time, this issue may not reflect the current COVID-19 situation in some or all regions of the U.S. For the most up-to-date pandemic information visit coronavirus.gov.

“Always remember that you are absolutely unique. Just like everyone else.”

— Margaret Mead

Sleep on This



National Sleep Awareness Week is March 14 to 20.

Are you getting enough shuteye? Most adults need an average of seven to nine hours of sleep daily. It's vital to our health and overall quality of life.

Ongoing sleep deprivation can lead to reduced immunity, reduced mental capacity and reduced fat metabolism. Continued sleep deprivation raises the risk for chronic health problems, including obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease.



So, if you routinely feel tired and irritable, you may need more or better sleep. Assess conditions that often disrupt your sleep:

- I have trouble falling asleep.
- I have too much on my mind to fall asleep or go back to sleep.
- I take more than 30 minutes to fall asleep.
- I can't go back to sleep when I wake during my normal bedtime.
- I feel tired upon waking, despite apparent normal sleep.

Checking two or more of these situations regularly indicates a sleep pattern that may be interfering with your life. Talk to your health care provider. Sleep problems are treatable.

Avoid Doom Scrolling

Repeatedly checking out bad news can be unhealthy.

Of course, the internet and social media are popular ways to stay informed about things that can potentially impact your safety or that of your region: a pandemic, hurricanes or earthquakes. But **doom scrolling** (also known as **doom surfing**) — searching for and reading article after article filled with bad news — isn't healthy.

Constantly scrolling through bad news can trigger sadness, anxiety or anger and contribute to headaches and lost sleep. What's more, finding differing information about medical crises or worrisome topics can be confusing and result in even more doom scrolling.

"Information overload is incredibly anxiety-provoking — which is true even when the information is accurate," says Yale New Haven infectious diseases specialist Jaimie Meyer, MD.

Try these tips to avoid, or reduce, doom scrolling:

- Go on a doom scrolling diet; check the news just once or twice daily.
- Avoid surfing for varying opinions on medical news. Dr. Meyer advises sticking to reputable sources, such as the CDC and the National Institutes of Health.
- Take a 24-hour respite from technology from **sundown to sundown March 5 to 6 for the National Day of Unplugging.** It's a good way to see how much calmer you can feel when you take a vacation from doom scrolling.



Take Care of Your Kidneys!



March is National Kidney Month and time to give your kidneys a health check. Your kidneys are small organs, but they perform many important functions: removing wastes and excess fluids, helping regulate blood pressure, and keeping certain nutrients, including potassium and calcium, balanced in the body.

Thirty million Americans have kidney disease, but many don't know it because symptoms usually aren't evident until the disease has progressed.

What's more, one in three Americans is at high risk for kidney disease, according to the National Kidney Foundation. Having other common health conditions, including type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure, increases the risk and so does a family history of kidney failure and being age 60 or older.

Kidney health tips:

- Be careful with over-the-counter nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen and naproxen. If taken for a long time, NSAIDs can cause kidney damage, the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases warns.
- If you have diabetes or hypertension (which can damage kidneys), work with your health care provider to keep those conditions controlled well.
- Eat a healthy diet, exercise regularly and see your provider for scheduled check-ups, including a check of kidney health.
- If you have any symptoms of kidney problems (including difficulty urinating, swelling in your face, legs or abdomen; bloody or foamy urine; fatigue or unusual thirst), contact your provider.



Dollar Digitization: How It Works

By Jamie Lynn Byram, PhD, AFC

Digital money represents any form of payment that is purely electronic. With the disruption of our economy due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the idea of digitizing the dollar has entered the spotlight again.

A digital dollar would be backed by the U.S. government. If you use your debit card, you are using digital money backed by your bank. A true U.S. digital dollar would be backed by the U.S. government (instead of a specific bank) and known as **central bank digital currencies (CBDCs)**.

However, there are risks. Safety controls to protect consumers from hackers are vital for consumers to willingly adopt the new form of payment. At this time, the outcome of the digital dollar as a national offering is still unknown.



TIP of the MONTH Bean Basics

New to eating chickpeas, beans and lentils? Start by buying canned cooked low-salt options, and drain well. Add some to salad, pasta or soup. Canned options are convenient since dried beans can take several hours to cook from scratch. Lentils cook faster than beans (probably because they are smaller). Red lentils cook in about 20 minutes, while green or brown lentils need to simmer for about 30 minutes. Use them in delicious soups or curry dishes.

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Plant-Based: What Does It Mean?

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

Plant-based eating is a lifestyle where you choose to eat mostly whole foods that come from plants. The plan involves replacing highly processed foods with lots of vegetables, fruit, grains, beans, soy, lentils, nuts and seeds.

Plant-based diets are good for human health and also for our planet.



March is Nutrition Month.

Unfortunately, the popularity of the term *plant-based* has led some food companies to misuse the term *made from plants* in their advertising campaigns. This term has taken on an undeserved health halo and is being used to sell cookies, soda, chips and candy made with ingredients that were once plants, such as white flour, sugar and processed oils.

Those are not whole, nutritious foods, and this marketing ploy makes plant-based eating confusing. For example, an orange is a whole plant-based food; an orange-flavored soft drink is highly processed. Both are made from plants (sugar was once a plant) but not equally nutritious.

The bottom line? The term *plant-based* does not necessarily mean *healthy*, so buyer beware. Yes, cola, potato chips and veggie dogs may contain ingredients that came from plants, but they have been highly processed and are no longer as nutritious as the whole foods used to make them. To truly reap the benefits of a plant-based diet, choose more whole plant-based foods, including: roasted chickpeas, tofu, edamame, whole-grain noodles, canned beans, mixed nuts, nut butter, quinoa, oats and all vegetables and fruits.

And, choose fewer of these processed plant-based foods: fake meat, chips, ice cream, cookies, cake, fruit-flavored candy, juice, white bread, white rice and soft drinks.

Vegetable Bean Soup with Quinoa

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|---------------------------------|---|
| 1 tbsp olive oil | 1 can (15 oz.) no-salt-added mixed beans, drained |
| 1 onion, chopped | 3 cups chopped kale |
| 3 garlic cloves, chopped | ½ cup quinoa |
| 2 carrots, diced | 8 cups water |
| 2 stalks celery, diced | 1 tsp salt, or more to taste |
| 1 zucchini, diced | 1 cup fresh chopped basil |
| 1 can (28 oz.) crushed tomatoes | ¼ cup freshly shredded Parmesan cheese |

Add oil to a large pot set over medium heat. **Add** onion, garlic, carrot and celery, and stir to combine. **Cook** about 5 to 7 minutes. **Add** zucchini, tomatoes, beans, kale, quinoa, water and salt. **Stir** together and let cook about 15 minutes, until quinoa and vegetables are tender. **Season** with salt to taste. **Add** to bowls, and top with basil and parmesan cheese. **Serve** hot.

Makes 6 servings. Per serving: 208 calories | 11g protein | 5g total fat | 1g saturated fat | 3g mono fat | 1g poly fat | 35g carbohydrate | 6g sugar | 9g fiber | 478mg sodium



EASY recipe

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EXPERT advice — Elizabeth Smoots, MD

Q: Drug interactions?

A: Drug interactions happen when a drug alters how your body processes medication. If you take two or more drugs, you may be at risk for unintended side effects, such as not absorbing a drug, metabolizing a medication too quickly or too slowly or even an overdose.

Drug interactions are common. For example, the antibiotic metronidazole may interact with the blood thinner warfarin to increase the risk of bleeding. Or the anti-seizure drug phenytoin can interact with oral contraceptive pills to reduce their effectiveness.

Take steps to avoid interactions: Keep your health care provider informed about all your prescription and over-the-counter medications and any dietary supplements. Maintain your own medication list and fill all your prescriptions at the same pharmacy. If you have medication questions, be sure to ask your provider or pharmacist.



EXPERT advice

— Eric Endlich, PhD

Q: What causes nightmares?

A: Nightmares are vivid, disturbing dreams that may awaken you, trigger fear and make it hard to fall back to sleep. The dreams typically involve plots that relate to safety or survival threats. Other factors commonly associated with nightmares include:

- Everyday life stressors or major setbacks, such as death of a loved one, loss of income, illness or traumatic events (e.g., physical injury or emotional shock).
- An irregular sleep schedule, interrupted sleep or decreased sleep time.
- Some medications, alcohol and recreational drugs.
- Sleep disorders, medical conditions and depression or other mental disorders.
- Frightening books and movies before bed.

Stress reduction, exercise, a regular sleep schedule, avoidance of triggers and resolution of mental health issues can all be helpful in reducing nightmares. If nightmares persist and interfere with your daytime functioning, consult your health care provider.



National Drug and Alcohol Facts Week is March 22 to 28.

Communicating with teens about drugs and alcohol can be difficult. Young people often have inaccurate information and may not understand the harm drugs and alcohol can do to their brains and lives. They can feel invincible, too. Parents and caregivers can find help at teens.drugabuse.gov. There's also a section specifically for teens with the latest information on drug use and health.

