

The Cold & Flu Battle Begins. Are your defenses armed?

'Tis the season...not only for sleigh bells to start ringing...but for those cold and flu bugs to start their annual attack! With the cold weather on its way, we tend to stay indoors more and more, with less natural ventilation and an increased exposure to the bugs from others around us. Are your defenses armed? This month starts a two part series on giving your immune system the boost it needs throughout the winter, to not only prevent you from getting sick, but also to help you get over a bug once you've got it!

We're going to begin by exploring nutrition for immunity. There are three goals to focus on to provide your immune system with the strong and efficient army it needs:

1. Clean, whole foods
2. Liver lovers
3. Immune boosters

Eating clean, whole foods means choosing organics whenever possible and avoiding processed, packaged and "fast" foods. Doing so reduces the overall stress on your body. And remember, an increase in stress of any kind disarms your immune system quite significantly. When you are grocery shopping, read the labels on products. Avoid artificial colours, sweeteners and additives. They do more damage in our bodies than good, adding to our overall stress levels. Choose fruits, vegetables, whole grains, healthy fats (flax oil, olive oil, sesame oil, nuts & seeds) and lean proteins (chicken, turkey, fish, beans, lentils, tofu, tempeh).

The overall health of the liver is important in immune system functioning for two main reasons. First, it helps manufacture some of the primary building blocks in the immune system. And second, it breaks down and removes toxins and waste in our bodies, to reduce the overall stress on our tissues. It's interesting that many of the foods that promote healthy liver function can also be classified as immune boosters. In general, immune boosters contain lots of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants that support the immune system (and many other systems) in its overall functioning. Below is a list of foods that are particularly helpful to your immunity. All those that are followed by an asterisk are also liver lovers.

Carrot*	Cauliflower*	Apple*	Pineapple*
Sweet potato	Cabbage*	Cantaloupe	Blueberries
Onion*	Beet (root & greens!)*	Red/Purple Grapes	Blackberries
Garlic*	Spinach*	Lemon*	Raspberries
Red Bell Pepper	Kale*	Mango*	Beans (all varieties)*
Butternut Squash	Watercress*	Papaya*	Lentils*
Broccoli*		Passionfruit	

One of my favourite side dishes for this time of year uses many of the vegetables in this list, so I thought I would share it you:

ROASTED ROOT VEGGIES

- 2 Large Sweet Potatoes, cut into ½ inch chunks
- 4-6 Medium Beets, cut into ½ inch chunks
- 3 Large Carrots, coined
- 2 Large Parsnips, coined OR ½ small rutabaga, cut into ½ inch chunks
- ½ Large Onion (white or purple), coarsely chopped (about 1 inch pieces)
- 2-3 cloves fresh garlic, minced (can add more to taste)

Toss all of the above in a little olive oil &/or sesame oil, enough to lightly coat the vegetables. Sprinkle on generous amounts of black pepper, basil, oregano, rosemary and turmeric. Spread on a cookie sheet and bake in the oven at 350F for 30-45 minutes or until vegetables are soft, stirring every 10-15 minutes.

I encourage you to experiment with all of the liver lovers and immune boosters and to keep your general winter nutrition focus on clean whole foods. Keeping your immune system armed through nutrition will help you win the battle against cold and flu bugs and keep you on your journey to health.