



## 7 Best Foods for a Healthy Immune System

Your diet can give your disease-fighting cells some ammunition. When you're battling an autoimmune disease, like rheumatoid arthritis (RA), lupus, or psoriatic arthritis, the right foods can play a part in your care. One way to help an immune system that's overworked is to eat a well-balanced, healthy diet, says Monica Piecyk, MD, a rheumatologist at New England Baptist Hospital and an instructor at Harvard Medical School. A healthy diet starts with fruits, vegetables, and whole grains and also includes low-fat dairy and protein. Add in these specific foods to bolster your immune system.

### Reach for Zesty Ginger

The phytonutrients in the zesty ginger root have therapeutic benefits for people with RA, according to a review published in 2014 in the journal *Arthritis*. The Arthritis Foundation recommends grating a tablespoon or two of fresh or dried ginger and sprinkling it on salad or veggies. Or brew a cup of ginger tea by placing one or two teaspoons of grated ginger in a pot of hot water. The National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health states that ginger is safe in small doses, but beware if you take blood-thinning medication like Coumadin (warfarin). Ginger itself can act as a natural blood thinner, so tell your doctor before adding it to your shopping list.

### Eat a Bounty of Beans

Red, pinto, navy, and black beans have a place in your immunity-boosting, anti-inflammatory diet for arthritis. Beans are an excellent source of protein, which plays an important role in building cells, including those of your immune system. Beans are also loaded with nutrients such as folate and other B vitamins, potassium, magnesium, and fiber, says Kim Larson, RDN, a spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Try a three-bean chili, or add beans to soups and salads. The Arthritis Foundation recommends eating at least a cup of beans once a week or more.

### Opt for Yogurt with Probiotics

Probiotics, found in foods like yogurt, are friendly bacteria that can boost your immune system, but you need to have some every day to get the benefit.

### Go Green

Dark green leafy vegetables such as kale, spinach, and Swiss chard are great immune-boosting foods and should be on your healthy RA menu frequently, if not daily. Here's why: They contain high levels of the vitamins C, K, and folate, which are all good immune system boosters. Also, the darker the leaf, the more antioxidants it has. Antioxidants help keep you healthy by neutralizing free radicals, unstable molecules that your body produces every day and that can damage your cells. Jazz up salads with a variety of greens. Talk with your doctor if you're on a blood thinner to avoid a negative interaction between the drug and the vitamin K in greens.

### Get a Boost with Extra-Virgin Olive Oil

Two or three tablespoons of extra-virgin olive oil each day can provide an immune system boost because olive oil has anti-inflammatory properties and is a good source of antioxidants. Look for extra-virgin olive oil, the first press of the olives with the highest concentration of antioxidants. Drizzle it on salads or over your steamed veggies, and use it in recipes instead of saturated fats like butter.

### Add Fish to the Menu

Put fatty fish such as salmon, mackerel, and herring on your menu. In fact, the Arthritis Foundation recommends eating fish two to three times a week. Also talk with your rheumatologist about whether fish oil capsules can help you get the recommended amounts of omega-3s, the fatty acids found in these fish. Fish oil also addresses two goals of good arthritis management: It not only decreases inflammation but may also boost the immune system.

### Go Green with Tea, Too

Make it green tea time to boost your immune system. A lab study published in *Arthritis Research & Therapy* in 2014 found that a polyphenol present in green tea has protective health benefits and may slow the progression of osteoarthritis, a common type of arthritis associated with aging. But know that you'd need to drink about eight cups throughout the day to keep your polyphenol levels steadily elevated, according to the Arthritis Foundation.

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