



Tips for Healthcare Workers — How to Keep Your Immune System Healthy

A healthy immune system is an important element in protecting you on the job from bloodborne pathogens, as well as cold and flu viruses. Here are some useful tips for keeping your immune system strong and balanced:

- **Get at least 8 hours of sleep at night.** To function optimally, your immune system needs down-time.
- **Take some time to relax every day.** Chronic stress decreases your white blood cells' ability to fight off infection. Try deep breathing, meditation, massage or biofeedback. Healthy relationships, good social support and positive thinking also can boost the immune system.
- **Practice good hand hygiene.** Hands are the most common carriers of cold and flu viruses. Wash your hands or use anti-microbial hand products frequently. Keep hand-to-face contact to a minimum.
- **Eat regular meals of nutritious, whole foods.** Avoid sugar—it slows down white blood cell activity, making you less able to fight off invading bacteria or viruses. Eat lots of fruits and vegetables, whole grains and some good-quality, low-fat protein.
- **Get regular exercise.** Choose an activity you enjoy. Research has shown that regular exercise increases the number of white blood cells in your body, decreasing the incidence of colds and flu.
- **Limit caffeine and alcohol.** Excessive use of either can impair immune function.
- **Some supplements can help.** The best source of nutrients is whole food, but many people don't get optimum levels from the food they eat. These supplements might help bolster your immune system:
 - **Vitamin A** stimulates white blood cell immune function and protects mucous membranes from invading viruses and bacteria.
 - **Vitamin B complex** increases the number of white blood cells to fight infection.
 - **Vitamin C** can help decrease the severity and length of colds or flu.
 - **Vitamin D** deficiency is common, especially in the NW in winter
 - **Vitamin E** improves immune response.
 - **Zinc** enhances immune system activity.
 - **Selenium** improves immune response.