Food and your immune system

KEEP IT moving!

Maintaining a healthy, balanced diet is key to helping your immune system function properly. This is something we may all be more concerned about during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly those with chronic conditions like heart disease or diabetes. We all need to nourish our bodies with good nutrition, get enough sleep, and exercise regularly to have a strong immune system and manage stress.

Mythbusters

You can boost your immune system with specific foods.

fiction

There is no one food, nutrient or supplement that can boost your immunity beyond normal levels. Only take supplements when advised by a healthcare professional.

fact

By eating a well-balanced, varied diet with plenty of fruit and vegetables, you can get all the nutrients your body needs and ensure your immune system functions normally.

fact

You need supplements to boost your immune system.

fiction

Maintaining a healthy diet, alongside medications, is particularly important for people with diabetes. Some evidence suggests long periods of higher blood glucose levels can increase the risk of viral infections.

fact

There is weak evidence natural therapies like garlic and Echinacea can help with seasonal colds, and none showing they can prevent COVID-19 infection.

fact

What to **avoid** to protect your immune system

ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS HIGH IN SATURATED AND TRANS FATS Potato chips, pastries and fried foods

HIGH SUGAR FOODS Cakes, lollies, ice-cream and chocolate

EXCESS ALCOHOL Health guidelines recommend no more than two standard drinks per day with at least two alcohol free days per week. However, people with diabetes and/or heart disease may need to drink less.

LOW FIBRE INTAKE Choose wholegrains as much as possible, avoid ultra-processed foods, and eat plenty of fruit and vegetables.

LACK OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY Evidence has shown three weeks of inactivity is equivalent to 30 years of ageing on the cardiovascular system.

Baker HEART & DIABETES INSTITUTE

These nutrients are important for normal functioning of your immune system.

They have moderate evidence for protecting against cold and flu, but no connection has been made to the novel coronavirus.

Zinc

Eat lean meat, fish, shellfish, nuts, seeds and legumes.

Vitamin C

Eat oranges, strawberries, tomatoes, broccoli and kiwi fruit.

Vitamin D

Eat eggs, liver and oily fish like salmon, and try to get a daily dose of sunshine at safe times.

This resource was produced by the Allied Health and Education Service team at the Baker Heart and Diabetes Institute.

Recipe

Mexi-bean frittata

(Source: Australian Healthy Food Guide)

INGREDIENTS

300g small sweet potatoes, unpeeled, chopped

1 tablespoon olive oil

2 corn cobs, husks and silks discarded, kernels removed

1 red capsicum, coarsely chopped

400g can black beans, rinsed, drained

2 teaspoons ground coriander

8 eggs

1/2 cup reduced-fat milk

1/2 cup coriander leaves

1 small avocado, cut into thin wedges

1 long red chilli, deseeded, thinly sliced

mixed salad leaves, to serve

Serves 4

Good source of zinc and vitamin D

METHOD

Step 1
Preheat oven to 180°C. Bring a small saucepan of water to the boil over high heat. Cook sweet potatoes for 6–8 minutes, or until tender when pierced with a skewer. Drain. Cut into wedges.

Step 2
Heat oil in a medium cast-iron or ovenproof frying pan over medium heat. Cook corn and capsicum, stirring, for 5–7 minutes, or until the capsicum is almost tender. Add sweet potato, black beans and ground coriander. Cook, stirring, for 2–3 minutes.

Step 3
Meanwhile, whisk the eggs and milk together in a large jug. Season well with cracked black pepper, to taste.

Step 4
Pour the egg mixture into the bean mixture and cook for 2–3 minutes, or until frittata is beginning to set around the edges. Scatter with half of the coriander leaves. Place in oven. Bake frittata for 15 minutes, or until golden and just set.

Step 5
Top the frittata with avocado, chilli and coriander leaves. Slice and serve with salad leaves.

Baker HEART & DIABETES INSTITUTE