

TAKE CHARGE!



March 2021

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.



March is Nutrition Month.

city events

Stress Management Webinar

Thursday, March 4
12:00 pm – 1:00 pm
Click [here](#) to register

A Parent's Introduction to Rethink Webinar

Tuesday, March 9
10:00 am – 11:00 am
Click [here](#) to register

Navigating Challenging Behaviors: Start With the Basics Webinar

Tuesday, March 9
11:00 am – 12:00 pm

Thursday, March 11
9:00 am – 10:00 am
Click [here](#) to register

Deferred Compensation Webinars

Nearing Retirement

Wednesday, March 10
12:00 pm – 1:00 pm
Click [here](#) to register

Navigating the Site

Wednesday, March 24
12:30 pm - 1:00 pm
Click [here](#) to register

Identity Theft Protection Webinar

Thursday, March 11
12:00 pm – 1:00 pm
Click [here](#) to register

Wellness for Busy People Webinar

Thursday, March 18
12:00 pm – 1:00 pm
Click [here](#) to register

Hinge Health Webinar

Wednesday, March 24
11:00 am – 12:00 pm
Click [here](#) to register

Health Plan Options for Retiring Employees

View the recorded 2021 webinar any time [here](#)

“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.

PB4.U®

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.



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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 undesired 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

EASY recipe

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| 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

Stay in Touch

Keep those questions and suggestions coming!

Phone: 800-871-9525

Fax: 205-437-3084

Email: PBeditor@ebix.com

Website: www.personalbest.com

Executive Editor: Susan Cottman • Advisers: Patricia C. Buchsel, RN, MSN, FAAN; Jamie Lynn Byram, MBA, AFC, MS; Eric Endlich, PhD; Mary P. Hollins, MS, JD, CSHM; Kenneth Holtyn, MS; Reed Humphrey, PhD; Gary B. Kushner, SPHR, CBP; Diane McReynolds, Executive Editor Emeritus; Zorba Paster, MD; Charles Stuart Platkin, PhD; Cara Rosenbloom, RD; Elizabeth Smoots, MD, FAAFP; Margaret Spencer, MD • Editor: Aimie Miller • Designer: Heather Burke

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Personal Best® Two Perimeter Park South, Suite 160 East, Birmingham, AL 35243 • 800-871-9525 • fax 205-437-3084.

News & Notes

- **Reverify Your Dependents by May 5:** Watch for a letter from Alight Solutions in early March about reverifying your dependents. To continue careful stewardship of the City's healthcare funds, employees who enrolled their spouse, domestic partner, step child or domestic partner's child in a City health plan before January 1, 2019, will be required to re-verify their dependents. You will NOT need to re-submit marriage and birth certificates again. Alight Solutions will be available to answer any questions you may have after you receive your letter.
- **New! Browse Child Care Openings and Discounts:** Access Kinside for child care openings and discounts up to 20 percent at top rated child care programs near you. All City employees are eligible for this benefit through join.kinside.com/city-of-seattle. If you are enrolled in a Health or Day Care FSA, access Kinside in your Navia portal at <https://www.naviabenefits.com/> for enhanced payment options. Watch for Kinside webinars starting in April.

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.



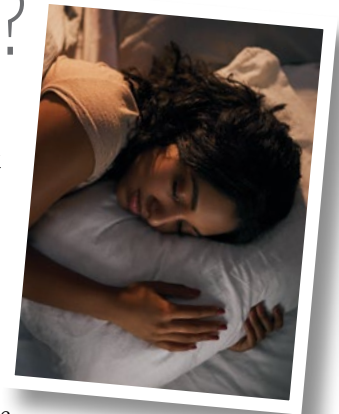
EXPERT advice — Eric Endlich, PhD

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.

