

HOW TO LOOK AFTER YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM



The immune system defends and protects the body from infection and illness.



The immune system is an intricate network of organs, cells, and proteins that work together to defend the body against infection.¹



As we continue taking measures to protect ourselves from COVID-19, it's important to take steps to support our overall health and well-being to help decrease our risk of getting ill.

Looking after our complex immune systems by following a healthy lifestyle and keeping up to date on vaccinations can help.



Get enough sleep

Getting enough sleep is linked to a healthier immune system: while sleeping, your body produces and releases cytokines – a protein that targets infections. Less sleep leads to poorer functioning of cytokines.²



Maintain a healthy diet and weight

Being underweight or overweight can weaken the immune system.^{3,4} Obesity can lead to reduced cytokine production and affect the way the immune system functions.

Eating healthily can support the immune system and help you maintain a healthy weight. A diet rich in fiber, fruit, vegetables, and protein can lead to a strong, healthy immune system. Vitamins C, A, and E, as well as iron and zinc, are very important in keeping your immune system healthy.⁴



Exercise regularly

Physical activity prompts antibodies and white blood cells to travel throughout the body more quickly, ready to identify illnesses.^{4,5} Exercise that leads to an elevated heart rate can also lead to better sleep, lower blood pressure, and reduced stress and anxiety.^{4,5}



Limit alcohol and tobacco use

Alcohol can weaken the immune system.⁶ Similarly, the chemicals found in cigarette smoke can have a negative impact. Smoking affects the balance of the immune system and can therefore increase the risk of immune and autoimmune diseases.⁷

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Minimize stress

Cortisol, the stress hormone, can boost immunity in small amounts. However, over time, increased cortisol levels can have a negative effect on several parts of the body, including the immune system. Stress also reduces the white blood cells that help fight infection.^{8,9}



Get your flu shot

There may not be a vaccine for COVID-19 yet, but there is one for the flu – and getting vaccinated is one of the simplest, most effective things you can do to help prevent and/or reduce the severity of it.



Keep up to date with all vaccines

Immunization prevents disease, disability, and death caused by many types of vaccine-preventable infections. Vaccines work with the body to produce an immune response, without the harmful complications of the disease. They are necessary even in areas where a disease no longer exists.¹⁰



Practice good hygiene

Hand-washing is being encouraged to prevent the spread of disease – now more than ever. Washing your hands with soap and water for at least 20–30 seconds and using a disposable tissue when you cough or sneeze are two of the most important steps in stopping the spread of germs.¹¹



If you have any questions about your general health and well-being, please contact your Cigna representative for advice and support.

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