

# Ask a Nutritionist!

by Tara Postnikoff

**Q:** My diet is decent, but I'm always getting sick during the winter. What are some superfoods that can strengthen the immune system and what foods should I avoid that may be sabotaging my immunity?



**A:** Eating a healthy and whole foods-based diet is the right way to start when looking to improve your immune system. But when that doesn't seem to be enough, try adding some superfoods to help boost your immune system. Superfoods can be thought of as foods that have beneficial phytochemicals and antioxidants. This speaks to the plant kingdom, specifically fresh vegetables and fruits. There are many classes of superfoods such as greens (grasses and algae), bee byproducts, herbs, sea vegetables, leafy vegetables, bright coloured fruits and vegetables.

Grasses (alfalfa, green barley and wheatgrass) as well as algae (blue-green algae, spirulina and chlorella) all are easy to digest and contain high concentrations of vitamins, minerals and phytochemicals as well as essential fatty acids, proteins and healthy bacteria.

Bee byproducts, such as Royal Jelly, Bee Pollen and Propolis, are great for strengthening the immune system by increasing energy levels and fighting stress as well as containing anti-inflammatory, anti-bacterial and antifungal properties.

Sea vegetables are very rich in minerals and protein that are essential for a strong immune system. They are usually found in dried forms so just rinse and soak them to make them soft again or add them to cooking (stews, soups, sauces). Green seaweeds include nori (sushi wrapping), kelp, dulse, kombu, wakame, arame and hijiki. They have strong flavours so if you are not used to them, start with small amounts a couple times per week.

Herbs, such as echinacea, ginseng root, astragalus, ginger root, licorice root and pau d'arco, are also great immune boosters. Dried mushrooms (reishi and shiitake) contain a high concentration of protein and antioxidants that also support the immune system.

Brightly coloured vegetables (yellow, orange and dark greens) are high in carotenes and are important for immune function. Try adding carrots, yams, sweet potatoes, red peppers, yellow and orange squash, tomatoes, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbages, cauliflower, collards, kale, as well as turnips and mustard greens to your diet. Berries and citrus contain other flavanoids, which are also important for immune function.

Probiotic supplements high in *Lactobacillus acidophilus* and *Bifidoacterium bifidumare* also good for strengthening the immune system by supporting the intestines and the good bacteria in the body. And of course fish oil, rich in Omega3 EPA, is great for supporting the im-

une system. If you are vegetarian try chia seeds, ground flax seeds or other vegetarian omega-3 oil.

Don't forget to think about the items in your life that may be sabotaging your immune system including the following:

- repeatedly consuming foods that you have an allergy, intolerance or sensitivity to
- consuming too much sugar, even natural sugar and alcohol. Studies have shown that consuming portions of 100 grams of sugar (glucose, fructose, sucrose) can reduce the ability of white blood cells to destroy bacteria and reduce vitamin C transport in the body.
- not getting sufficient sleep and exercise
- high stress (physical, emotional, lifestyle, and environmental).

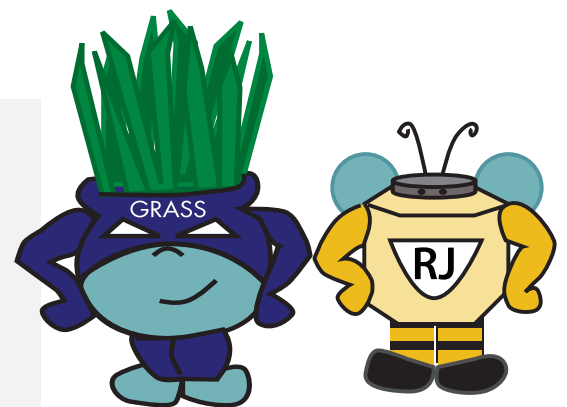
Remember that a well-balanced whole foods-based diet and staying well-hydrated is the best place to start for a strong immune system. If you are looking for that extra immune boost try adding superfoods to your diet.

Consult your primary care practitioner before starting any supplements or herbal protocol. 🗨️



## About Tara

Tara Postnikoff is a Registered Nutritional Consultant and certified Personal Trainer in Toronto and is the founder of Healthy Eating Active Living. Tara is an avid distance runner and triathlete, a Training program Instructor and a regular Guest Speaker for the Running Room training programs. Tara can be reached at [tara@heal-nutrition.com](mailto:tara@heal-nutrition.com) or [www.heal-nutrition.com](http://www.heal-nutrition.com).



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