

Is your immunity **off-balance?**

Turn your body into a seriously strong fighting machine with these failsafe defence-boosters

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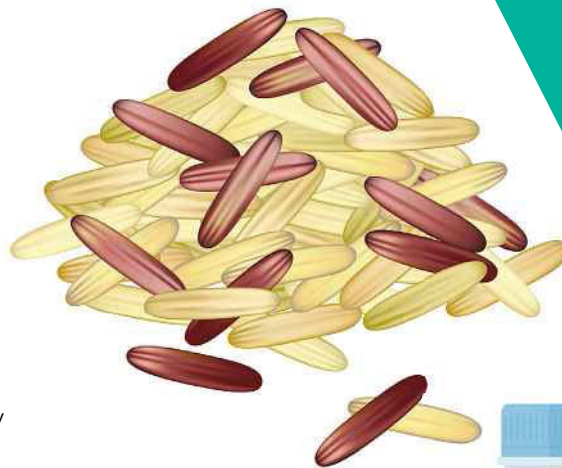
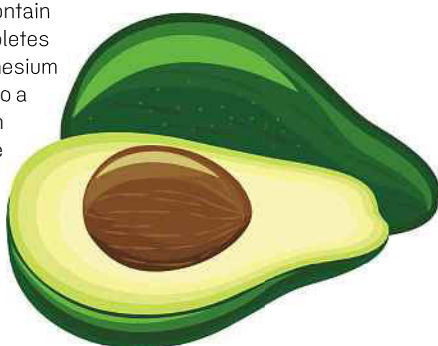
If it feels like you've been battling the flu non-stop or you're always exhausted, a weakened immune system may be the culprit. 'Immunity can dip at the beginning of the year due to a combination of having consumed a slightly poorer diet, elevated stress levels from the hectic festive period, a lack of sleep and perhaps the fact that, during winter, we tend to be indoors and within closer proximity to one another, which means there is more opportunity for viruses to spread,' explains nutritionist Angela Yussuff.

Start the year on a healthy note by putting some extra measures in place to build up your defences. The right dietary choices coupled with some practical lifestyle measures will help keep your immunity levels in check, so your body is equipped to seek out and destroy foreign bodies effectively. 'The immune system is made up of cells that all play a different role. One of the important cells involved in our immune response are white blood cells (also called leukocytes), which come in two basic types - phagocytes and lymphocytes. These cells remember and recognise previous invaders,' says Angela. For these cells to be firing on all cylinders, your body needs to be properly nourished and rested.

To help you battle bugs, we've put together the most common reasons your immunity may not be functioning properly - and an action plan to make sure your wellbeing comes up trumps.

CULPRIT 1: YOU'RE A FIZZY DRINK FIEND

Cracking open that afternoon can of cola could be doing your immunity more harm than good. These sweetened drinks contain phosphoric acid, which depletes levels of calcium and magnesium - minerals that contribute to a healthy immune system. 'In addition, the sugar in these drinks can cause your white blood cells to become less effective at killing germs,' says Angela.



TAKE ACTION: Glug back good old water instead of fizzy drinks. Find plain H₂O too... blah? 'Try flavouring your water with slices of fruit or vegetables instead (such as lemons, oranges or cucumber). Natural yoghurt can also be very beneficial for the immune system. It helps the body produce antibodies and strengthens white blood cells,' says Angela.



CULPRIT 2: YOU HATE YOUR JOB

Overwhelmed by your ever-expanding to-do list? Can't seem to find the right balance between work and play? 'When we're stressed, the immune system's ability to fight off antigens is reduced and that is why we are more susceptible to infections. Psychological stress generally decreases the effectiveness of the immune system and slows down the crucial healing process,' says Angela.

TAKE ACTION: A nutritious diet can be the perfect remedy when your job gets too much. 'Foods containing B vitamins, like

wholemeal bread and brown rice, help your body to release energy from food and fight stress. Also, consider increasing your intake of important immune-boosting nutrients such as vitamin C and zinc, which can be depleted through stress,' advises Angela.



CULPRIT 3: YOU LIKE A LIE-IN

Waking up earlier comes with multiple benefits. You get more exposure to daylight during the winter months, you have time for a proper breakfast, and you'll almost certainly have a more productive morning than you would if you hid under the covers. But if you find yourself hitting the snooze button, it may be because your sleep routine is out of sorts - and a sleep pattern that's gone haywire can take its toll on your immunity. 'Studies show that if we are sleep-deprived, our lymphocytes go down while inflammatory

proteins called cytokines increase. So frequent all-nighters may decrease your body's ability to respond to infections.

TAKE ACTION: While there is no substitute for sleep (sorry), an anti-inflammatory diet can help to prime your immune system. 'Omega-3-rich oily fish, nuts and avocado have potent anti-inflammatory properties. Also, some people find that eating a banana or an oatcake half an hour before bed helps them to sleep longer. This is because these foods are a good source of tryptophan, an amino acid that has a calming effect,' says Angela.