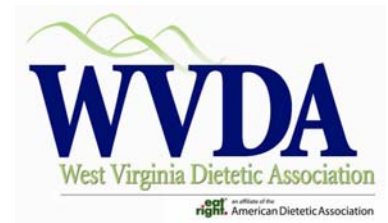


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FIGHTING ILLNESS WITH FOOD: WEST VIRGINIA DIETETIC ASSOCIATION ASKS WHAT IS YOUR “FLUTRITION” IQ?

(FAIRMONT) – Many people’s knowledge of nutrition and various seasonal illnesses is rooted in old sayings: “An apple a day keeps the doctor away” or “Starve a fever, feed a cold.” But what really works? Can a certain diet boost immunity or help you recover from a cold or flu more quickly? The American Dietetic Association and its West Virginia affiliate takes a closer look at nutrition and your health to find out what is effective.

“Some products on store shelves may claim immunity-boosting benefits, but there’s no food that will magically protect you from catching the flu,” says Christine Gerbstadt, a spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association who is both a registered dietitian and a physician. “A healthy diet can help reduce risk and help you get better faster, but a strong immune system can’t fight off every cold and flu germ that comes your way.”

Is there anything that can be done? A trip to the store offers numerous ideas from antioxidant beverages, special immune-boosting vitamin supplements and nutrient-rich cereals. What is worth buying and what is a waste of money?

“A healthy, nutrient-rich diet based on the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* offers the best protection against illness,” says Gerbstadt.

Here are a few tips on getting the most health benefits from your food during flu season:

Variety: Whether they’re canned, frozen or fresh, adding more fruits and vegetables into your diet is a way to ensure you are getting the most nutrients and vitamins from your foods. Selecting foods from all of the food groups will also help you to get protein, calcium and fiber in your diet. “Focusing too much on one food group and not enough on others can cause deficiencies in your diet,” says Gerbstadt. “There is no need to load up your grocery cart with special items that tout ‘immunity boosting’ benefits.”

Vitamins: Is it necessary to pop a pill to help boost immunity throughout the flu season? “Most healthy people can get the nutrients they need from food,” says Gerbstadt. “Many vitamin C supplements promise to boost your immunity. However, most people already get enough vitamin C in their diet. Additional supplements can be a waste of money if you’re already eating enough of that vitamin or mineral.”

Food Safety: During flu season, *how* you eat is as important as *what* you eat. Following food safety rules can significantly reduce your risk of illness. Washing hands before and after food preparation is the best way to ensure that you aren’t spreading germs to others. Wash all vegetables and fruits before eating them.

Healthy Lifestyle: In addition to eating a healthy diet, get plenty of sleep every night. Physical activity is always an important part of staying healthy. If you can’t go outdoors for some exercise, try to stay as active as possible by exercising indoors.

“It’s best to take a skeptical approach to all flu-fighting claims on foods or vitamins,” says Gerbstadt. “Ask a registered dietitian or your doctor before taking any supplements or making any major changes to your diet. There’s no secret weapon in the fight against the flu—an overall healthy lifestyle is your best defense.”

The American Dietetic Association is the world's largest organization of food and nutrition professionals. The West Virginia Dietetic Association, our state's affiliate, is committed to improving West Virginia's health and advancing the profession of dietetics through research, education and advocacy. Visit the West Virginia Dietetic Association at www.eatrightwv.org.

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