



Words **Nathalie Gibbins**

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DAYS TO

SUPER-IMMUNITY

» Fend off this season's colds and bugs by getting your defences into top gear with our can't-fail, ultra-fast, health-boosting plan...

MONDAY

AM Up your friendly bacteria

Probiotics enhance your immune system by triggering the release of defence cells in your body that kill bacteria and viruses. So eat lots of live yogurt during winter or try a multivitamin with probiotics, such as Seven Seas Multibionta, £4.59, and get double the immune-protecting benefits. In trials, people taking Multibionta cut colds by an average of two days and their symptoms were less severe than those who didn't take it.

PM Make a healthy smoothie

Juice Master Jason Vale (www.thejuicemaster.com) recommends his Turbo

Charge smoothie to keep you fighting fit. Blend the following ingredients (it makes two servings):

- ¼ cucumber
- 1 stick celery
- ½ small pineapple, peeled and chopped
- handful of spinach leaves
- ¼ lime, peeled
- 4 Golden Delicious apples
- ½ ripe avocado
- small handful of ice

'This super-smoothie provides the body with all its seven essential needs: water, vitamins, minerals, essential fatty acids, good carbohydrates, amino acids and enzymes. It's a fantastic body cleanser

and immune-booster, and is also great for your hair, nails and skin,' says Vale.

TUESDAY

AM Go for a run

Regular exercise boosts your immune system. A survey of 700 recreational runners found that 61% of them reported fewer colds since taking up running. 'Exercise encourages immune cells to circulate through your body more quickly, making them better able to kill bacteria and viruses,' says Dean Hodgkin, fitness consultant at Ragdale Hall Health Hydro (01664 434831; www.ragdalehall.co.uk). 'However, research has shown that bouts



of extremely intense exercise result in certain cells being released into the bloodstream that lead to immuno-depression. The good news is that regular moderate exercise reduces this effect, so if you compete in sports events that require full-out exertion, your best preparation is lower intensity workouts.' You can also protect your body by taking a supplement such as Boots Feel The Difference Exercise Support (£7.99 for 30 capsules), an antioxidant-rich multivitamin and mineral that contains glucosamine and fish oils to protect your joints.

PM Cleanse your liver

If your liver isn't functioning properly, neither will your immune system. 'Your liver filters toxins and produces bile for digestion. If it's sluggish, you'll have cell-damaging toxins floating around your system and your cells won't be getting the right nourishment from food,' says Penny Povey, a naturopath from The Ella Clinic in London (020 7935 5281). She recommends a dual-action soup that will cleanse your liver and boost your immune system. Cook green beans, courgettes and celery until soft, then add garlic, parsley, ginger, cayenne pepper, thyme and rosemary. Add a cube of Marigold Swiss Vegetable Bouillon Powder, £1.79 (from Sainsbury's), blend and serve.

WEDNESDAY

AM Switch to super-bread

Make sure your morning toast is made with Nutralaw Selenium Enriched Bread (available from Waitrose, 89p). This bread is made from wheat grown in selenium-enriched soil, a mineral that's vital for a healthy immune system. It's estimated that the majority of British people are deficient due to low levels of it in our soil. 'Spread mashed banana and honey on top,' says Karen Knowler, head of The Fresh Network, Europe's largest raw food organisation. 'Bananas are packed with essential nutrients, such as potassium and vitamin B6, and honey is full of antioxidants. Both will give you plenty of energy for the day and strengthen your resistance to infections.'

PM Get garlicky

Add some garlic to your dinner. 'Garlic is nature's antibiotic,' says Knowler. 'More than 1,000 clinical trials have shown that garlic's immune-boosting properties are due to the sulphur compounds found in allicin, an antioxidant that's released when fresh

garlic is crushed. However, studies suggest that you get similar benefits from cooked garlic – so long as you let the bulbs sit out for a few minutes after peeling,' says Knowler. Don't like the taste of garlic? Try Health Perception's Allimax tablets, £6.99 for 30 (from Holland & Barrett and Boots). It contains as much allicin as 40 bulbs of garlic – without the odour or taste.

THURSDAY

AM Pick up some pelargonium

This herbal remedy is being touted as the new echinacea for helping relieve colds and sore throats. In trials, it shortened the symptoms of tonsillitis and bronchitis by two days – so it's a vital addition to your alternative first-aid kit. Try MedicHerb UK Pelargonium, £8.99 (0845 4567040 or from Boots). Another surprising herbal helper is St John's wort, says Dr Ann Walker, a herbal practitioner and senior lecturer in Human Nutrition at the University Of Reading. 'As well as lifting the winter blues, St John's wort supports the stem cells that make infection-fighting white blood cells. It can be taken safely throughout winter, although be aware that St John's wort can interfere with the effectiveness of the Pill.'

PM Say a little prayer

People who go to church at least once a week are twice as likely to have strong, stable immune systems as people who don't. Churchgoers have lower levels of immune-damaging interleukin 6, according to research at Duke University Medical

Center in the US. It's thought it could be due to better stress control among churchgoers.

FRIDAY

AM Treat yourself without guilt

Feeling guilty may reduce the ability of your immune system to fight off illness. In studies, people who felt guilty had lower levels of immunoglobulin-A, a chemical associated with a strong immune system. 'Treat yourself to something decadent yet health-promoting to create a win-win situation,' says Knowler. 'It can be as simple as a fresh fruit salad made with juicy mangoes, fresh pineapple and sweet, ripe bananas. Chocoholics can benefit from the health-giving properties of cacao (from which chocolate is derived) by blending equal amounts (according to taste) of cacao with raw carob powder (both available at www.fresh-network.com) with half a pint of soya milk and a couple of fresh dates. This shake has all of the flavour of chocolate but no immune-busting nasties such as sugar.'

PM Drink wine with your mates

Numerous studies have shown that a good social life equals fewer bouts of colds and flu. 'It's possibly because those with good social support suffer less stress,' says Povey. So have a fun night with your friends – and don't skip alcohol. Drinking wine, especially red, stops people from developing colds, according to Spanish scientists. Those who drank more than two glasses of red wine a day had 44% fewer colds than teetotalers. Bottoms up! □

FIVE-MINUTE RESISTANCE BOOSTERS

1 BE LOVING

Giving and receiving hugs and affection makes your body produce more natural virus-killing cells.

System CD, £22.99

(01628 898366; www.vitalia-health.co.uk). It contains positive affirmations such as, 'My immune system protects me'.

2 THINK POSITIVE

Studies show that optimists have stronger immune systems than those with a negative outlook. So give your mind some positive affirmations with Vitalia Health's InnerTalk Powerful Immune

3 SCRUB UP

Dry brush skin before showering, always towards your heart, to stimulate your lymphatic system. Lymph nodes produce and store white blood cells, needed to fight infections.

4 DRINK THE VIBES

'Make an immune-boosting crystal elixir,' says Kate Tomas (www.katetomashealing.com), a leading crystal therapist. 'Place a piece of clear quartz (also known as rock crystal) in a glass of mineral water and leave overnight. Clear quartz (available from www.holisticshop.co.uk) is the master healer. In the morning, remove the crystal and drink.'