



Natural ways to **BOOST YOUR FAMILY'S** immune system before winter

While we may not even realise it, our immune system is constantly on call. Daily activities such as visiting a public bathroom or shaking a colleague's hand can expose us to germs.

For the most part our immune system does a great job of keeping us healthy, but with winter fast approaching it can be beneficial to consider natural ways to increase our immunity.

“The immune system is responsible for defence against infection from organisms or other invaders,” says Dr Ryan Harvey of House Call Doctor.

“It is made up of cells, proteins, tissue and organs and defends against germs and micro-organisms every day.”

The immune system is comprised of tonsils, thymus, lymph nodes and vessels, bone marrow, white blood cells and the spleen.

Everyone is born with a level of natural immunity, but



passive and adaptive immunity evolves constantly. There are some simple ideas you can integrate to help strengthen your family's immunity:

1. WHOLESOME NUTRITION

“Wholesome nutrition is crucial for maintaining good

health and a strong immune system,” says Dr Harvey. “The majority of your diet should incorporate unprocessed foods, such as fresh fruit, vegetables, legumes, whole grains, nuts and seeds.”

To help boost your immune system try adding foods rich in:

- **Vitamin C** – Fresh fruits and veggies; especially citrus fruits, kiwi fruits, strawberries, broccoli, cabbage and parsley.
- **Zinc** – Found in red meat, chicken, fish, dairy, eggs, legumes, sunflower and pumpkin seeds.
- **Ginger** – Add ginger into your cooking, as this helps break down toxins, particularly in your lungs or sinuses.
- **Probiotics** – Good bacteria helps your body to digest nutrients and supports your immune system. Probiotics are easily found in yoghurt.

2. EXERCISE REGULARLY



Regular exercise is a pillar of healthy living. While the cooler weather may have you rugged up on the couch, try and get the family out for a brisk walk each day.

“Regular exercises helps promote cardiovascular health, lowers blood pressure and can protect against a variety of diseases,” says Dr Harvey.

It is not comprehensively understood how exercise impacts the immune system, but studies have proven more active people are less likely to suffer from a cold in winter.

“Exercise doesn’t need to involve over-exertion” says Dr Harvey. “Moderate physical exercise such as riding a bike or going for a brisk walk with the family will suffice.”

3. SUFFICIENT SLEEP

Lack of sleep has an enormous impact on both our physical and mental health. Adverse effects may include impairing our immune system from properly defending against cold, flus or infection.



“While the link between sleep and immune function is still being researched, sleep does have a sizeable impact on our bodies ability to defend against illness,” says Dr Harvey.

The Sleep Health Foundation recommends to following:

- **Newborns:** 14 - 17 hours
- **Infants:** 12 - 15 hours
- **Toddlers:** 11 - 14 hours
- **Preschoolers:** 10 - 13 hours
- **School-aged children:** 9 - 11 hours
- **Teenagers:** 8 - 10 hours
- **Adults (18 - 64 years):** 7 - 9 hours
- **Over 65 years:** 7 - 8 hours

4. REDUCE STRESS

An entire field of study, psychoneuroimmunology, is dedicated to discovering the effect of the mind on health and resistance to illness.

“The relationship between mind and body is closely linked,” says Dr Harvey. “Stress is often shown through symptoms of the gut, a key component of the immune system.”

When we are under stress our ability to fight off antigens is reduced, making us more susceptible to illness.

“Stress may also have an indirect influence on our immune system,” says Dr Harvey. “Some individuals may turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms for stress such as drinking and smoking.”

Here are some tips to de-stressing for the whole family:

- **Walking** – A brisk walk can increase the production of endorphins; happy hormones which melt stress away.
- **Meditation** – In a quiet, dark space, focus on deep breathing to relax the mind and body.
- **Unplug** – Take some time out each day to unplug from the TV or mobile devices and be present in the moment, even if it is just 10 minutes.