



Cold Busters

Many products promise to supercharge your immunity. Which ones actually work?

Your immune system protects you from marauding bugs and viruses. So it's natural to want to protect and even strengthen your immunity.

That's why immune-boosting diet supplements are such big business: in 2006, Americans spent more than \$1.5 billion on them, according to the *Nutrition Business Journal*. But not all immune boosters work equally well—

and some of them don't work at all.

We questioned experts in complementary medicine, including our own Andrew Weil, M.D., to find out which immune boosters are worth a try. We also asked which herbs and foods these experts recommend to improve immunity. Their answers follow. But first, two cautions:

★ "People believe that because these products are natural, they're safe," says Melinda Ring, M.D., medical

director of the Center for Integrative Medicine at Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Chicago. It's vital to mind warning labels and keep your doctor in the loop, since some herbs can interact with drugs or other herbs. ★ Also, pills aren't shortcuts. The best way to strengthen your immune system is with a lifestyle that includes proper diet, exercise, stress reduction, good sleep, and a positive outlook, says Gary Deng, M.D., Ph.D., assistant director at the Botanical Research Center of the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center Integrative Medicine Service in New York City.

Combo-Formula Immune Boosters

Over-the-counter products that combine natural immune boosters to help prevent or diminish colds and other ailments

COLD-FX

- *Active ingredient:* North American ginseng root
- *Use:* Take regularly to prevent illness or at the first sign of a cold
- *Not for:* People with serious medical conditions; people on blood thinners, except on doctor's orders

New Chapter

Organics Host Defense

- *Active ingredients:* A blend of 17 mushrooms
- *Use:* Take regularly to strengthen immunity
- *Not for:* People on blood thinners, except on doctor's orders

Nature's Way Sambucol Black Elderberry Original Syrup

- *Active ingredient:* Elderberry extract
- *Use:* To treat colds, flu, or sinusitis
- *Not for:* Long-term use

Nature Made TriMune

- *Active ingredients:* Andrographis, echinacea, vitamin C, zinc
- *Use:* To treat colds
- *Not for:* Long-term use

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For black-and-white reprints of this article call 866-888-3723.

Individual Herbal Supplements

Herbs that have been shown to improve immune function

North American ginseng

- **Use:** Take regularly to prevent illness or at the first sign of a cold
- **Not for:** People with fibroids or certain cancers; can interact badly with drugs for heart disease, diabetes, or depression

Astragalus


- **Use:** Take regularly to prevent colds and flu
- **Not for:** People on immune-suppressing drugs to treat cancer, or organ-transplant recipients

Echinacea purpurea

- **Use:** Take at the first sign of a cold
- **Not for:** People with autoimmune conditions—such as lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, Graves' disease, or liver disease

Elderberry

- **Use:** To treat colds, flu, or sinusitis
- **Not for:** Long-term use

 **Probiotics** Treating an infection with antibiotics can wipe out the “good bugs” that live in your intestinal tract and battle invaders. To replenish these helpful critters, eat yogurt daily or take a supplement containing strains of *Bifidobacterium* or *Lactobacillus*.

VITAMINS & MINERALS










“We should get most of our vitamins and minerals from foods, especially fruits and vegetables,” says Weil, “but I recommend that everyone take a good multivitamin-multimineral supplement as insurance against gaps in the diet.” If you take a daily multivitamin, make sure its contents don’t overlap with any combined herbal product that also includes vitamins. Here are the immune-boosting vitamins and minerals our experts recommend.

Key: IU = International Units; mg = milligrams; mcg = micrograms.

| VITAMIN | DOSE | FOOD SOURCES |
|------------------------------|--|---|
| Vitamin A | 15,000 IU of mixed carotenoids per day | Carrots, cantaloupes, sweet potatoes, spinach, kale, tomatoes |
| Vitamin B₆ | 25 to 50 mg per day | Bananas, carrots, lentils, tuna, salmon, whole-grain flour, sunflower seeds, chicken, soybeans |
| Vitamin C | 500 to 1,000 mg per day | Oranges, grapefruits, lemons, kiwis, blackberries, raspberries, strawberries, blueberries, carrots, sweet potatoes, sweet peppers, tomatoes, spinach, kale, broccoli, cabbage, Brussels sprouts |
| Vitamin D | 800 to 1,200 IU per day | Cod-liver oil, fortified milk, fortified orange juice, salmon, mackerel, tuna (sunlight is also a source of this vitamin) |
| Vitamin E | 400 to 800 IU per day | Sunflower seeds, vegetable oils, whole grains, avocados, almonds, hazelnuts, walnuts, wheat germ |
| Copper | 900 mcg per day | Oysters and other shellfish, whole grains, beans, nuts, potatoes, organ meats, dark leafy greens, dried fruits, cocoa, black pepper |
| Selenium | 80 to 200 mcg per day | Brazil nuts, organ meats, fish, shellfish, chicken, wheat germ, brewer’s yeast |
| Zinc | 15 mg per day | Oysters, eggs, turkey (dark meat), pumpkin seeds, crabmeat, yogurt, milk, red meat, beans, nuts |

SUPERFOODS

“Your body will absorb vitamins better through foods than through supplements,” says Toni Bark, M.D., medical director of the Center for Disease Prevention and Reversal in Evanston, Illinois. “Diet is the basis of our building blocks.” These superfoods are power-packed with nutrients that will help your body ward off infection.

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| Asian mushrooms (shiitake, maitake) <i>Active ingredients:</i> Beta-glucans, a type of carbohydrate | Chocolate (dark) <i>Active ingredients:</i> Antioxidants, magnesium, and potassium | Garlic <i>Active ingredient:</i> Allicin, a sulfur compound that boosts the production of white blood cells | Red meat <i>Active ingredients:</i> Selenium, zinc | Sweet potatoes <i>Active ingredients:</i> Vitamin C, beta carotene | Salmon <i>Active ingredients:</i> Vitamin A, vitamin D, selenium, omega-3 fatty acids | Berries (red and blue) <i>Active ingredients:</i> Vitamin C, antioxidant compounds called flavonoids | Soybeans <i>Active ingredients:</i> Vitamin B ₆ , vitamin E | Tea (green and white) <i>Active ingredients:</i> Vitamin C, antioxidant flavonoids |

BOTTOM: FROM LEFT: NEIL FLETCHER AND MATTHEW WARD/GETTY IMAGES; ROSEMARY CALVERT/GETTY IMAGES; MICHAEL ROSENFELD/GETTY IMAGES; MARK WEISS/GETTY IMAGES; FOODCOLLECTION/GETTY IMAGES; DAVIES AND STARR/DIGITAL VISION/GETTY IMAGES; MARK WEISS/GETTY IMAGES; KRIS TIMKEN/DIGITAL VISION/GETTY IMAGES; FOODCOLLECTION/GETTY IMAGES