

# Do Immune-Boosting Foods Really Work?

Hundreds of products make that claim, but **you're better off eating a healthy diet** and having a healthy lifestyle. ::

BY LYNN ALLISON

**C**OVID-19 BROUGHT INCREASED awareness to the importance of a strong immune system to combat severe illness.

And since the pandemic began, hundreds of new products have filled grocery shelves claiming to boost the immune system.

For example, Good Crisp Company spiked its cheddar cheese balls with a product called Wellmune that promises to help train the immune system to target invading pathogens.

Riff LLC now offers plant-powered energy beverages loaded with vitamin C, a proven immune booster.

Some of PepsiCo's products, such as versions of Mountain Dew soda and Evolve protein shakes, are fortified with vitamin C and zinc, a mineral that has also been shown to improve immunity.

According to The Wall Street Journal, more than half of U.S. adults say they would be interested in buying foods and beverages that say they boost immunity.

A recent survey of nearly 4,000 adults conducted by CivicScience also found that more than one-third say they wouldn't mind paying extra for the added nutrients.

"Immunity comes up in nearly every conversation I have with clients," says Lu Ann Williams of Innova Market Insights, a global market company for consumer packaged goods, specializing in the food and beverage and personal care sectors.

"We are afraid to get sick. American healthcare is very messy. Consumers are looking for a cheaper alternative that brings some type of silver bullet."

The added nutrients in immunity-claim marketing are often vitamin C and zinc, which experts say do enhance your immune system.

While the majority of individuals get enough of these nutrients eating wholesome foods, some people may be deficient because of a poor diet.

"The best way to boost your immunity is to get proper sleep, exercise regularly, stay hydrated, and eat a variety of nutritious foods," Tara Collingwood, a registered dietitian from the Orlando area, tells Newsmax.

"Foods that are fortified with immune-boosting nutrients like vitamin C and zinc may help make up for nutrient deficiencies in some people. That being said, it is always best to get nutrients naturally in foods as often as possible."

And experts warn that an immune-support claim shouldn't convince you to

buy a product that is highly processed or high in sugar or fat.

"If you're making brand choices or product choices based on that or paying a premium for that, you are being taken advantage of," says Michael Starnbach, a professor of microbiology and immunobiology at Harvard Medical School, according to the WSJ.

Legally, the Food and Drug Administration permits food marketers to describe the ingredients in their products and discuss the effects they have on the body, as long as the information is accurate.

However, food products can't claim that they treat or cure illnesses, unless the claim meets FDA regulations.

Critics say that adding vitamins and other ingredients to otherwise unhealthy foods is mainly a COVID-19 marketing strategy, and it is still best to eat wholesome foods to boost immunity.

"COVID-19 is where the money is," says **Jacob Teitelbaum, M.D.**, a board certified internist and author of *From Fatigued to Fantastic*.

"Trying to scrape together a few nutrients out of junk food is really not the way to protect yourself. For example, the sugar in a 12-ounce can of soda can suppress your immunity by 30% for three hours.

"A better solution would be to eat healthy food which can dramatically help immunity, and take a good multivitamin with at least 100 milligrams of vitamin C and 15 milligrams of zinc, along with 2,000 IU of vitamin D and 100 micrograms of vitamin K." □



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