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Eating Healthy Will Help Prevent Sickness

Healthy food and lifestyle choices are important to maintain a strong immune system and will help prevent you from getting sick this year. Making the right food choices can be an important step in staying healthy during flu season. Certain nutrients can help the body position its defense system to prevent sickness.

The immune system is particularly sensitive to subtle changes in nutrition. Poor nutrition compromises immunity. Weakened immunity opens the way for infectious diseases, which in turn raises nutrient needs and reduce food intake, often causing nutrition status to suffer further.

Impaired immunity is a hallmark of protein-energy malnutrition. Deficiencies of vitamins and minerals also diminish the immune's response. The following food groups provide nutrients that assist the body in maintaining a healthy immune system:

- Fruits and vegetables are excellent sources of folate and vitamin A and vitamin C.
- Antioxidants including vitamin A, vitamin C, vitamin E and selenium are important in maintaining the immune system.
- Chicken, meat, fish, beans, cheese and eggs are sources of protein, iron, zinc and vitamin B6. These nutrients are also very important to the diet in order to maintain a healthy immune system.

Good health comes down to eating a healthy diet that includes adequate amounts of food from all the MyPyramid food groups. It is important to keep in mind other healthy behaviors during this time of the year.

The following are recommended:

- Eat a healthy diet that follows the MyPyramid.
- Wash your hands regularly throughout the day. Do so more if you are around people who are fighting illness.

- If you qualify to get a flu shot, be sure to take advantage of this opportunity.
- People with depressed immune systems, such as the elderly, may benefit from nutrient supplements. Talk with your doctor to see if a nutrient supplement is right for you.

Don't forget the children. Remind them to practice healthy habits because germs spread, especially at school. The Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service offers its programs to all eligible persons regardless of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, or status as a veteran and is an equal opportunity employer. Information given herein is for educational purposes only. References made to commercial products or trade names are with the understanding that no discrimination is intended and no endorsement is implied. Oklahoma State University, U.S. Department of Agriculture, State and Local Governments Cooperating.