

# Leyla Weighs In: A strong immune system starts with a healthy gut

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If you're concerned about the state of your immune system this cold and flu season, focus on your gut. Seventy percent of immunity is in the Gut Associated Lymphoid Tissue (GALT) which is part of the gastrointestinal tract. The most profound influences on gut integrity are poor diet, haphazard and overuse of antibiotics, overindulgence of alcohol, smoking, and frequent use of NSAIDS [aspirin, ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), naproxen sodium (Aleve)].

While we can't shield ourselves from every ill, there are steps we can take to lower risk of accidents and illness. And along with looking both ways before crossing the street, and wearing a bicycle helmet EVERY time you ride your bike, there are multiple opportunities every day to manage the things we *can* control, such as the food we choose to eat and our lifestyle choices.

Antibiotics do a very good job of wiping out bad bacteria, but also wipe out the beneficial bacteria critical to the health and functioning of the GI tract. A poor diet full of antinutrients such as sugars, refined flours, trans fats, and food toxins such as pesticides, herbicides, artificial ingredients, additives and allergens contribute to an unhealthy immune response.

Handwashing is important for ridding microbes and pathogens and can reduce chances of acquiring the flu by as much as 50 percent. But also take care of the *terrain* which is *you* and the *health of your gut*. This gives you the best chance to stay well during cold and flu season.

Sleep and regulated circadian rhythms are an important part of the equation when it comes to immunity. Most adults need six to eight hours of restful sleep every night. Aim to get to bed before 11:00 pm every night because the most restorative sleep occurs between 11:00 pm and 2:00 am.

Commit to changing to a healthier diet and better lifestyle choices. You will reap the benefits of your efforts with an optimally functioning immune system.

To your health!

