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Winter tips

At this time of year, diminishing daylight, the onset of colder weather and sometimes stressful pre-Christmas run-up may mean that our resistance is lowered, making us more vulnerable to colds, 'flu and chest infections.

The immune system is complex and can be affected by many factors, nutrition being one. Here are some tips to increase your resistance this winter:

- Eat locally grown, organic foods in season as these have a higher nutrient content to support the immune system.
- This is the time of year for "warming" foods like casseroles, soups and stews. As well as vegetables, don't forget to include some protein sources e.g. beans, lentils and meat.
- Include onions and garlic which contain powerful sulphur compounds which act as effectively as anti-viral and anti-bacterial agents.
- Beta Carotene is the non-animal form of Vitamin A and it is a powerful lung protector, helping to strengthen and repair the lining of the respiratory tract and decreasing inflammatory substances called leukotrienes. Good food sources are orange and yellow fruit and vegetables (sweet potatoes, carrots, kale, spinach, winter squash, fresh thyme, broccoli).
- Vitamin E is an oxygen carrier and it helps in destroying harmful free radicals which attack lung tissue. Good food sources are cold pressed vegetable oils, dark leafy green vegetables, nuts and seeds.

- Include plenty of vitamin C-rich foods in your diet - peppers, broccoli, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, spinach
- Zinc helps maintain the thymus (the master gland of the immune system) and helps to reduce inflammatory processes. Good food sources of zinc include seafood, nuts, seeds, pulses, lamb, haddock, and oats.
- Try to include some oily fish (mackerel, sardines, salmon) in your diet. Oily fish contains omega 3 essential fatty acids which assist immune function and reduce inflammatory reactions.
- And lastly, eat thoughtfully, calmly and chew your food thoroughly to aid digestion and absorption of nutrients.

Here's a nutritious and warming breakfast recipe for winter mornings:

Ingredients

1 apple, chopped and cored (can be peeled or unpeeled)
100g rolled oats, uncooked
Water
Pinch of cinnamon (optional)
Pinch of nutmeg (optional)
Grated fresh ginger (optional)

Directions

Combine apples and water and season, if preferred. Bring to the boil. Stir in rolled oats; cook till it is the preferred consistency. Cover and let stand several minutes before serving. You can also add a few nuts or seeds.

One serving.