**8 Ways to Boost Your Immune System If You’re Over 65**

If you’re over age 65, here’s what you can do to strengthen your immune system and prevent the flu and its complications.

**1. Get a flu vaccination**

An annual flu vaccination can reduce your risk of infection by [40 to 60 percent Trusted Source](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/vaccineeffect.htm).

It can take up to two weeks for the flu vaccine to be effective. The vaccine works by stimulating your immune system to create antibodies, which can help protect against an infection.

There are different types of flu vaccines. Some vaccines are available to people of all age groups.

Fluzone and Fluad are two vaccines specifically for older adults ages 65 and older. These vaccines provide a stronger immune system response to vaccination compared to a standard-dose flu shot.

The flu virus changes from year to year, so you’ll need to repeat vaccination each year. You can get the flu shot from your doctor, a pharmacy, or a flu clinic in your area.

When you get a flu vaccine, also ask your doctor about pneumococcal vaccines to protect against pneumonia and meningitis.

**2. Eat a healthy diet**

Eating a healthy, nutrient-rich diet is another way to boost your immune system so that it can fight off viruses. This includes eating a diet rich in fruits and vegetables, which contain vitamins and antioxidants to promote good health.

You should also reduce your intake of sugar, fat, and processed foods, and choose lean meats. If you feel that you’re not getting enough vitamins and nutrients from your diet alone, ask your doctor if they recommend taking a multivitamin or herbal supplement.

**3. Get active**

Strenuous physical activity can become harder with age, but that doesn’t mean you should stop moving completely. Regular physical activity can strengthen your immune system and help your body fight off infections and viruses.

Aim for at least 30 minutes of physical activity for three days a week. This can include walking, biking, yoga, swimming, or other low impact workouts.

Exercise increases blood circulation and has an anti-inflammatory effect on the body.

**4. Lower your stress level**

Chronic stress can affect your immune system, decreasing its effectiveness. When under stress, the body increases the production of cortisol. This is a hormone that helps the body deal with stressful situations. It also limits bodily functions that aren’t essential in a fight-or-flight situation.

Short-term stress doesn’t harm the body. Chronic stress, on the other hand, lowers your immune system response, making you susceptible to viruses and illnesses.

To help reduce your stress level, set limitations and don’t be afraid to say no. Engage in activities that you find enjoyable and relaxing, such as reading or gardening.

**5. Get plenty of sleep**

Sleep deprivation also reduces the effectiveness of the immune system. Sleep becomes more important with age because it also helps improve brain function, concentration, and memory. Older adults who don’t get enough sleep are also susceptible to nighttime falls.

Aim for at least seven and a half to nine hours of sleep per night. To improve the quality of your sleep, make sure your room is dark, quiet, and cool. Keep a regular bedtime routine and limit daytime naps to no more than 45 minutes. Don’t consume caffeine late in the day and don’t drink water and other beverages one and a half hours before bedtime.

Talk to your doctor if you have sleep problems to identify any underlying causes.

**6. Maintain a healthy weight**

If you’re overweight, increasing physical activity and adjusting your diet can also help you shed excess pounds. This is important because carrying too much weight has a negative impact on your immune system.

Both physical activity and eating a healthy diet can reduce inflammation and keep your immune system healthy and strong.

**7. Quit smoking**

The chemicals in cigarettes are known to damage lung tissue and increase the risk for cancer. But they can also cause respiratory illnesses such as the flu, bronchitis, and pneumonia.

To improve your immune system function, take steps to kick a cigarette habit. Use smoking cessation aids such as nicotine patches or nicotine gum. You can also talk to your doctor about medications to reduce cravings for cigarettes.

**8. Spend time outdoors**

Vitamin D also helps strengthen the immune system. If your vitamin D level is low, your doctor may prescribe supplements or recommend an over-the-counter multivitamin.

Spending additional time outdoors allows your body to naturally convert vitamin D from sun exposure. The amount of sun exposure to get the vitamin D you need will depend on your skin tone. Some people need [as little as 15 minutes](https://www.vitamindcouncil.org/about-vitamin-d/how-do-i-get-the-vitamin-d-my-body-needs/), whereas others may need up to two hours.

Head outside when the sun isn’t too strong to avoid a sunburn.

**The takeaway**

The flu is a potentially dangerous virus for people ages 65 and older. It’s important that you take steps to strengthen your immune system to avoid a cold and flu.

Still, influenza isn’t always preventable, so see a doctor immediately if you develop any symptoms. Antivirals taken within the first 48 hours may reduce the severity of the infection and the severity of symptoms.