

Ask the Expert:

What Foods and Nutrients can Help Prevent Cold and Flu this Winter?

Written by Mary Morgan, Purdue University Nutrition and Dietetics/ Nutrition Fitness and Health 2024

The transition from fall to winter brings colder weather and the holiday season. Unfortunately, winter is also a time when there is a higher chance of getting sick with a cold or the flu. A healthy immune system can prevent these illnesses. Some immune-supporting nutrients include beta carotene, vitamin C, vitamin D, zinc, and protein. These nutrients can be found in many foods especially vegetables and fruits, and can be used to create balanced meals. For example, sweet potatoes have high levels of beta carotene, broccoli has vitamin C, and tofu is a great source of zinc. Trying to get at least 5 servings of vegetables and fruits a day is a good start to getting enough of these important nutrients and strengthening your immune system.



One common myth is that taking vitamin C supplements can prevent winter colds. Although some studies have shown that increased levels of vitamin C may decrease cold symptoms, vitamin C cannot prevent catching a cold. Vitamin C is important for the growth and repair of body tissue and works to prevent disease. Eating foods with high amounts of vitamin C is a great way to get enough of this nutrient during cold and flu season. Some vitamin C rich choices are: citrus fruits such as grapefruit and oranges, tomatoes, potatoes, and green and red bell peppers. Eating these fruits and vegetables raw can help you get the most vitamin C from these foods, but even when they are cooked, they still provide vitamin C.

Prioritize good health this holiday season and consume a variety of nutrients to support your immune system daily! Additionally, wash hands properly, get an appropriate amount of sleep, and practice good hygiene.

Sources: <https://www.eatright.org/food/vitamins-and-supplements/types-of-vitamins-and-nutrients/how-vitamin-c-supports-a-healthy-immune-system> , <https://www.eatright.org/health/wellness/preventing-illness/how-to-keep-your-immune-system-healthy> , <https://th.bing.com/th/id/OIP.ccHS2Hpxz6rsdeu8ZRICkwHaFH?w=252&h=180&c=7&r=0&o=5&pid=1.7>

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Food Safety: Defrosting

Written by Adina Miller, Purdue University Nutrition and Dietetics/ Nutrition, Fitness and Health 2024

During the holiday season, freezing leftovers is a good way to economize and use all of the food that you buy and prepare. Thawing out frozen foods or defrosting in a safe way can lessen the growth of bacteria and lower the chances of foodborne illness. Perishable foods, such as poultry and meat should never be thawed in hot water or at room temperature on the counter. These two situations may put the food in the “Danger Zone”, which is when bacteria multiply. This zone lies between 40 and 140 °F. See the tips below for several methods of thawing.

Refrigerator Thawing:

- Move food from freezer to the fridge
- Let frozen items thaw in the fridge for about 24 hours

Cold Water Thawing:

- Put the frozen food in a leak-proof bag
- Submerge the bag in cold water
- Change the water every 30 minutes for about 2-3 hours (the time will vary depending on the weight of the food)
- When the food is completely thawed, the food must be cooked right away

Microwave Thawing:

- After thawing the frozen food in the microwave, plan on cooking the food immediately

Cooking Without Thawing:

- It is safe to cook frozen foods without thawing them, but it will take about 50% longer to cook



Sources: <https://th.bing.com/th/id/OIP.yuQCSfUQp7z73yg86EDQJgHaE8?w=222&h=180&c=7&r=0&o=5&pid=1.7> , <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics/big-thaw-safe-defrosting-methods>

20-Minute Chicken Creole

Ingredients (8 servings)

- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil*
- 2 chicken breasts* (whole, skinless, boneless)
- 1 can diced tomatoes* (14.5 oz, with juice)
- 1 cup chili sauce
- 1 green pepper (chopped)
- 2 celery stalk (chopped)
- 1 onion (chopped)
- 2 garlic cloves (minced)
- 1 teaspoon dried basil
- 1 teaspoon dried parsley
- 1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- Rice* or whole wheat pasta*

Directions

1. Heat pan over medium-high heat. Add vegetable oil and chicken and cook for 3-5 minutes.
2. Reduce heat to medium.
3. Add tomatoes with juice, chili sauce, green pepper, celery, onion, garlic, basil, parsley, cayenne pepper, and salt.
4. Bring to a boil. Then, reduce heat to low and simmer, covered for 10-15 minutes.
5. Serve over hot, cooked rice or whole wheat pasta.

Nutrition Facts (per serving)

Calories: 76
Protein: 8g
Carbs: 6g
Fat: 3g



Sources: <https://www.myplate.gov/recipes/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap/20-minute-chicken-creole>

* foods included in TEFAP (The Emergency Food Assistance Program) <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tefap/usda-foods-available-list-tefap>

Eating Right: Meal Planning

Written by Clay Watkins, Purdue University Nutrition and Dietetics 2023

Many Americans are busy. Full schedules and busy lifestyles often lead to eating out instead of cooking at home. On average, restaurant food is higher in sodium, fat, calories, and portion size compared to food made at home. But, eating healthy at home can be easier with a little planning ahead of time.



Planning can start at Myplate.gov to make healthy choices for your meals. Not only does MyPlate give a simple picture of how your plate should look for meals, but it also gives tips about saving money, portion control, and healthier eating at home. Once you know what a healthy and balanced meal looks like, turn to your weekly grocery ads to plan meals around sale items and in-season produce when it is cheapest. Don't worry if you can't get fresh produce, canned and frozen fruits and vegetables are just as healthy. Eating at least 5 servings of fruits or vegetables can help with portion control of higher-calorie foods.

Being mindful of portion sizes at home and in restaurants can also help to control calories. Since we feel full by the amount of food that we eat and not just the calories we consume, slowly adding more fruit and vegetables to your meals can reduce calories while making you feel full and satisfied. You can also try low-calorie ingredients in recipes. For those famous Indiana casseroles and potato salads, use low-fat cream soups and mayonnaise. If you get stuck with certain foods, grab the family and a recipe book, and choose some new recipes. As always, check out MyPlate.gov for more information on how to cook healthier meals at home.



<https://www.myplate.gov/>

Sources: https://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/healthy_eating/meals.html, <https://www.myplate.gov/> <https://www.myplate.gov/>

eat-healthy/what-is-myplate.,Byrd-Bredbenner,C., Gaille,M., Berning,J.,Kelley,D.(2018).Wardlaw's Perspectives in Nutrition (11th ed.) McGraw-Hill Education.,<https://th.bing.com/th/id/OIP.vCA0v9Ox2AlnInjypVkh0gHaE6?w=293&h=194&c=7&r=0&o=5&pid=1.7>,<https://th.bing.com/th/id/OIP>



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This newsletter is edited by Adina Miller and Heather A. Eicher-Miller, PhD and is created by the Eicher-Miller Lab in the Department of Nutrition Science at Purdue University. This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

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In The News: White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health

IN THE NEWS

Written by Kaitlan Tracy, Purdue University Nutrition and Dietetics 2023

This September, the Biden-Harris Administration hosted the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health. The conference was the first on Hunger, Nutrition and Health in over 50 years! The goal was to promote nutrition security through 5 main areas for Americans:

1. *Increase food access and affordability.*
2. *Integrate nutrition and health.*
3. *Empower all consumers to make and have access to healthy choices.*
4. *Support physical activity for all.*
5. *Enhance nutrition and food security research.*



To increase food access and affordability, the Administration is pushing to raise minimum-wage, giving children access to healthy school meals, giving SNAP benefits to underserved populations, putting more funding towards the Older Americans Act, and more. The Administration hopes to increase healthy consumer choices by improving nutrition labelling resources and providing more healthy choices.

The conference set clear goals for America to improve healthy eating and physical activity while ending hunger by the year 2030. For more information on the conference and administration actions, please visit: <https://health.gov/our-work/nutrition-physical-activity/white-house-conference-hunger-nutrition-and-health>

Source: <https://th.bing.com/th/id/OIP:ijeBlagly4ltNOiB469rIQAAAA?w=239&h=132&c=7&r=0&o=5&pid=1.7>