

Eat right to fight flu

Diet is an important aspect when you are ill and can help you to get well faster. STACEY CHIA reports

It is flu season and you may not have the appetite to eat or drink when you are having a cold. However, in addition to taking medication, you should know that some foods can help speed up your recovery and boost your immune system.

Ms Teo Kiok Seng, a nutritionist at Nutrition Network Services, and Ms Jaclyn Reutens, a dietician at Aptima Nutrition & Sports Consultants, shed light on some of these foods.

Hot porridge or soup

Have a bowl of hot porridge with shredded chicken or turkey.

"The liquid from the hot porridge helps loosen mucus that can cause congestion and helps prevent dehydration," said Ms Teo.

Adequate fluid intake is important to replace the fluid that is lost from diarrhoea or vomiting.

It is not enough just to have a bowl of porridge. By adding some lean meat like turkey and chicken, you can improve your immune system as these meats contain iron and zinc.

Turkey is even more beneficial as it also contains selenium and the amino acid tryptophan that helps to promote a healthy immune system.

An alternative to this would be to make a bowl of soup with chicken (above) or turkey.

Garlic

Garlic is touted as a natural antibiotic.

"It contains allicin, an antibiotic that can help defend your body from



Stay away from carbonated drinks. Even drinking just two cans can reduce the ability of your white blood cells to fight bacteria.

bacteria and viral infections," said Ms Reutens.

You can eat it chopped up, roasted whole or have it with your porridge in place of oily condiments.

Ginger

You can make yourself a cup of ginger tea with the following recipe, said Ms Teo:

1. Grate one tablespoon of raw ginger.
2. Add one cup of boiling water to the ginger and leave it for five to 10 minutes.
3. Strain the ginger and add honey.

Ginger is commonly used in certain areas of China when people feel the onset of a cold. It helps induce sweating, which the Chinese believe helps cure a cold as sweating removes toxins.

In addition to drinking ginger tea, it can be added to your soup or porridge.



Hot tea

Drinking cups of hot tea throughout the day can help strengthen your immune system said Ms Teo.

A 2003 study by Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard University showed that theanine, an ingredient found in tea, helps to strengthen the immune system.

Tea also contains flavonoids, which have antioxidant properties.

Ms Reutens advice is to drink tea with a low caffeine content like green tea or chamomile tea, as caffeine dehydrates you.

Banana

If your flu symptoms include diarrhoea, try eating bananas. "Bananas



contain pectin, a soluble fibre, that helps gel watery stools," said Ms Teo.

In addition, it is rich in vitamins A, C, B6 and zinc, which help boost immunity.

Yogurt

"When you have stomach flu, your intestines are removed of probiotics or good bacteria," said Ms Teo.

Probiotics are essential as they help our body digest food more easily by eliminating unhealthy bacteria that causes gas, constipation and bloating.

To replenish it, eat yogurt as it is rich in probiotics.



What to avoid

■ Deep fried chicken wings –

"Oily food takes a longer time to digest. When you have a cold, what you need is food that is easily digestible so that your body can absorb the nutrients faster for recovery," Ms Reutens said.

■ Coffee – According to Ms Reutens, coffee causes dehydration because of its caffeine content. When you have flu, it is important to ensure that you are hydrated.

■ Sugary food – Food that is high in sugar can impair your immune system. They are also filled with empty calories and have no protein, vitamins or minerals.

According to health website WebMD, too much sugar suppresses the cells in your immune system that are responsible for attacking bacteria.

Drinking just two cans of a carbonated drink can reduce the ability of your white blood cells to fight bacteria.

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Fact or fiction

Flu virus harder than cold virus

The claim: Flu viruses live longer on surfaces than cold viruses.

The facts: Most people know that cold and flu viruses can contaminate doorknobs, taps and other surfaces. But for how long?

Studies have found that the survival time for both kinds of viruses varies greatly, from a few seconds to 48 hours.

The reasons have to do with a number of factors, including the type of surface, humidity and temperature.

For example, cold and flu viruses survive longer on

inanimate surfaces that are non-porous, like metal, plastic and wood, and shorter on porous surfaces, like clothing, paper and tissue.

Most flu viruses can live one to two days on non-porous surfaces, and eight to 12 hours on porous surfaces.

However, a 2006 study found that avian influenza seemed particularly hardy, surviving as long as six days on some surfaces.

Cold viruses, however, deteriorate quickly. A study in 2007 found that when objects in a hotel room – like light switches and

telephones – were contaminated with a cold virus, 60 per cent of healthy volunteers picked up the virus when they touched one of the objects an hour later. Eighteen hours later, the transmission rate was cut in half.

On skin, cold and flu viruses generally last less than a few minutes, but that can be plenty of time. Studies show that most people touch their hands or mouth several times in the course of daily activities – enough to cause infection.

The bottom line: Flu viruses tend to survive longer than cold viruses.

The New York Times