

Kefir immunity up!

Here is the second serie of stories on the wonderful health benefits of kefir

According to the *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, flu season creeps all the way from November through early spring. And studies have shown that the average person contracts about three colds each year. Which means as we enter the homestretch, it's as important as ever to keep your immunity up and strong.

You can get a flu shot, sleep eight hours a night, wash your hands and cough into your elbow all you want. But one very proactive step to bolstering your immunity is incorporating probiotic-rich kefir into you daily routine.

Jonny Bowden, PhD, board certified nutritionist, author of *"The 150 Healthiest Foods on Earth"* (Fair Winds 2007) and e-Diets and iVillage *"Weight Loss Coach,"* is an a big fan of kefir for its immunity-building properties. "A healthy gut depends upon a balance between 'good' bacteria and 'bad' (i.e. Candida), much as a healthy garden depends upon the proper balance of flowers and weeds," Dowden explains. "If the weeds overrun the garden, you're in deep trouble. Similarly, you need to keep the gut populated with the 'good' bacteria to keep the 'bad bugs' in check. *Probiotics* — like those found in naturally fermented foods like yogurt and kefir — are essential to this process."

In fact, kefir was named one of Bowden's "150 healthiest foods on earth" (the name of his book – see www.jonnybowden.com for more information). "The gut is one of the largest and most important centers of the immune system, and a healthy gut ecology is essential to absorbing and digesting nutrients," he says. Probiotic-containing foods like kefir are essential during cold and flu season for preventing offending molecules from entering the bloodstream and creating reactions that can cause symptoms of ill health.

South Africa-based Ingrid van Heerden, D.Sc, "DietDoc" for www.health24.com, says that probiotic-containing foods like kefir are important for maintaining a strong natural defense system because they stimulate the production of immunoglobulin in the intestines, which improves the body's immune response. Some other nutritionally based ways to shore up your immunity? Bowden likes foods that have high levels of natural *anti-inflammatories* — mostly vegetables and fruits — as inflammation is a major component of almost every degenerative disease. Van Heerden also recommends omega-3 supplements or at least three weekly servings of foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids (salmon is a great source.) She also recommends a well-balanced diet rich in protective nutrients and *probiotics* (either as supplements or from fermented foods that contain LIVE organisms – she noted that certain products don't contain LIVE organisms because they have been pasteurized or heat-treated).

Lastly, Bowden mentioned some very important non-food ways to booster immunity, which have to do with relationships and connections. "Every study shows that people who are connected to other people — through friendships, communities, marriages, and the like — live longer and healthier and have better performing immune systems!" So make a date with a friend or organize a family dinner and bring along some *kefir!*



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