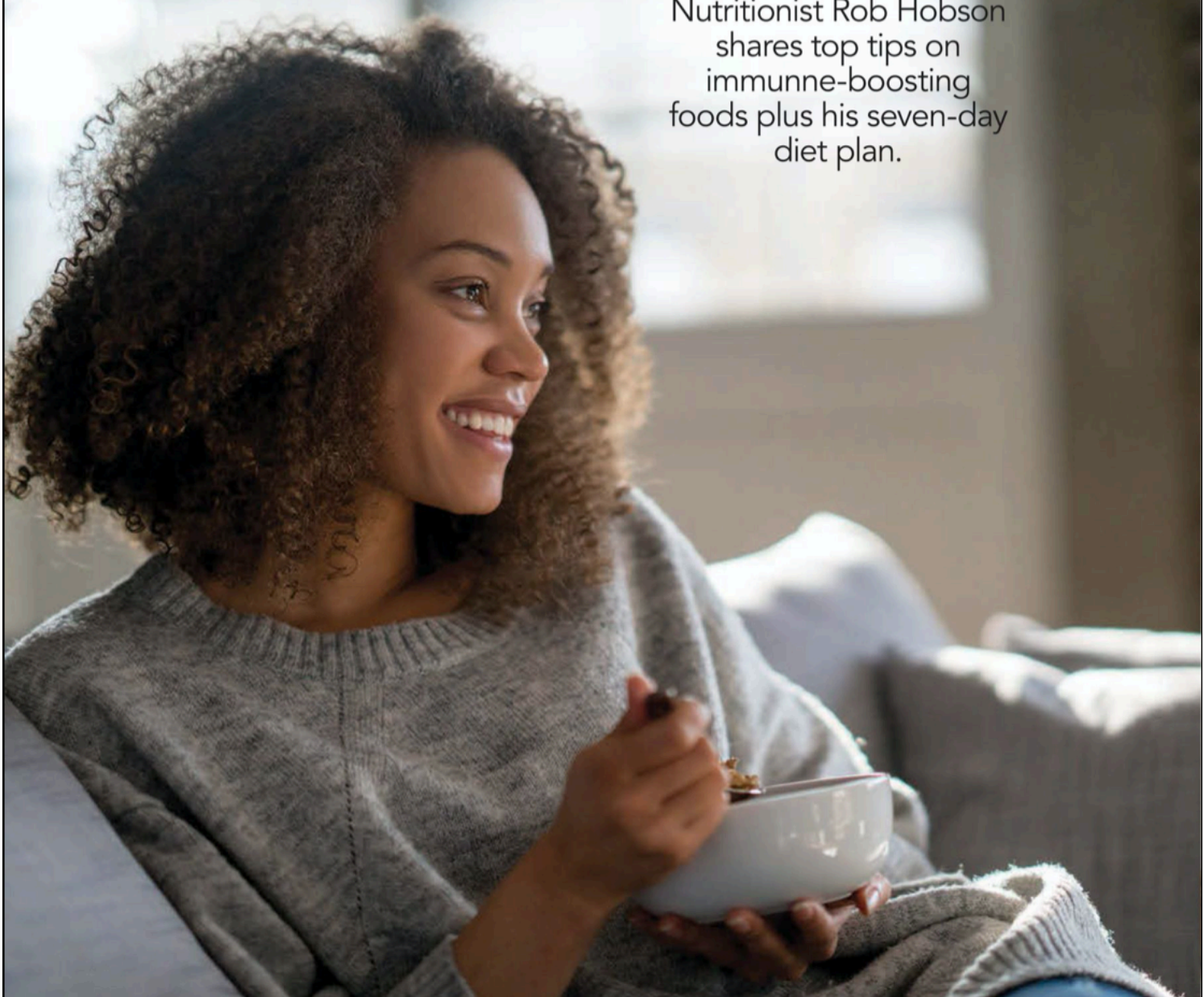


A woman with voluminous curly hair is shown in profile, smiling and looking towards the right. She is wearing a grey knit sweater and is holding a white bowl with a spoon, eating from it. The background is a soft-focus indoor setting with a window.

Eat well to **STAY WELL**

Nutritionist Rob Hobson
shares top tips on
immune-boosting
foods plus his seven-day
diet plan.

OUR BODIES ARE constantly exposed to foreign invaders and it's the responsibility of our immune systems to protect us against the harm they may cause. We possess two different types of immunity – innate is the first line of defence, which prevents these foreign invaders entering the body and includes barriers such as skin and mucus that traps pathogens. The second is adaptive immunity, which is where pathogens are recognised from previous exposure then destroyed by specific immune cells.

DIET AND YOUR IMMUNITY

Science has long understood the importance of nutrition for good health and that those who live in poverty are often malnourished and, as a result, more vulnerable to infectious diseases. However, what is less clear is whether the increased susceptibility to infection is a direct result of the effects of malnutrition on the immune system.

Despite this, there are certain nutrients and other elements of your diet that have a role to play in immune function. Such nutrients that play a role in maintaining a healthy immune system include iron, zinc, selenium and vitamins A, C and E.

Eating a diet rich in whole natural foods not only supplies you with a good source of these key nutrients, but antioxidant compounds that help reduce inflammation in the body by protecting it from the build-up of excess free radicals.

The diversity of bacteria in your gut also play a role in immune function

7 seasonal superstars

Put these on your shopping list for an immunity boost that will see you straight through to spring.

SALMON

Rich in selenium, salmon is required for the synthesis of antibodies and of T lymphocyte cells, which help fight viral and bacterial infections.

QUINOA

This pseudo grain is rich in zinc, which plays a central role in the immune system.

RED PEPPERS

The humble pepper is rich in vitamin C, which has been shown to reduce the risk of catching a cold and the length of infection.

BRAZIL NUTS

These nuts are rich in selenium, of which low levels may affect the way respiratory epithelial cells respond to the flu.

BLACK BEANS

To help your body fight infection, try eating black beans. These are rich in iron, which is involved in the production of antibodies and are necessary to fight infection.

BUTTERNUT SQUASH

This autumn staple is rich in vitamin A, which supports innate immunity, maintaining the integrity of mucosal cells in the GI tract, eye and respiratory system – the first line of defence against infection.

MUSHROOMS

These fungi are rich in vitamin D, which has been shown to reduce the risk of upper respiratory tract infections. Put them in the sun to boost the D.

and your diet is just one lifestyle factor that can impact on your microbiota. Given a significantly large percentage of your immune system resides in your gut, it makes sense that the bacteria present have a role to play.

Researchers have slowly been unravelling the complex relationship between gut bacteria and immunity, suggesting that interactions between your gut and the bacteria that colonise it help control how your body responds to illnesses.

SIZE MATTERS

Maintaining a healthy weight is important for your immunity. Obesity can encourage chronic inflammation, which is at the root of many diseases and this can develop over a long period of time, causing damage to tissues and organs in the body. Curbing your intake of foods high in 'free' sugars and refined carbs can help to prevent weight gain as can avoiding highly processed foods rich in bad fats and low in essential micronutrients.

A study of 1,000 people administered the flu vaccine found that those who were considered obese were twice as likely to still get the flu compared to those who were a normal weight.

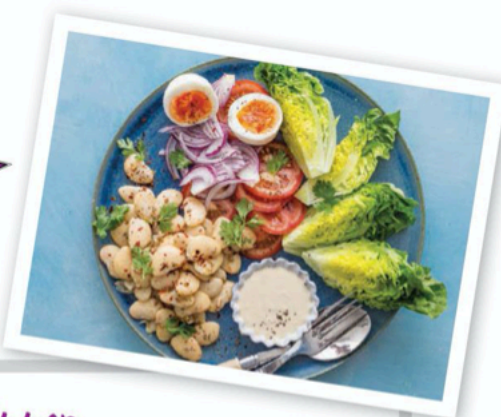
Fortunately, there are changes you can make in your diet that can help quell inflammation in the body and support a healthy immune system. Adopting a Mediterranean style of eating is one way. This diet consists of plenty of plant-based foods, healthy fats, such as olive oil and oily fish, and a reduced amount of red meat and sugar.



WORDS: ROB HOBSON. PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY IMAGES AND SHUTTERSTOCK

YOUR 7-DAY EATING PLAN

Rob's filling meal suggestions will keep you going throughout autumn and winter – and beyond!



Mon: Mushrooms on toast

100g cooked mushrooms and tarragon on 1 slice of wholegrain toast.

Tue: Smoothie

In a blender, mix ½ avocado, ½ banana, 250ml almond milk, 80g frozen berries, 2tbsp oats and a handful of spinach.

Wed: Fruit and nut yoghurt

150g probiotic yoghurt with 4 Brazil nuts and 2 dried apricots.

Thur: Scrambled eggs with mushrooms on toast

2 eggs, scrambled, with cooked mushrooms and 1 slice of

wholegrain toast.

Fri: Salmon and avocado

50g smoked salmon with ½ avocado and 6 cherry tomatoes.

Sat: Cinnamon and pear porridge

Porridge (made from 4tbsp oats and 275ml milk) topped with pear slices, 4 walnuts and ¼tsp of cinnamon.

Sun: Boiled eggs with Marmite

2 boiled eggs with 1 slice of wholegrain toast and 2tsp of Marmite.

Lunch

Mon: Harissa vegetable wrap

Spread 2tsp of harissa paste and 1tsp of Greek yoghurt over 1 wholemeal wrap. Add sliced red pepper, cucumber and grated carrot, ½ can tuna and coriander, then roll.

Tue: Ham salad pitta

1 wholemeal pitta filled with 50g wafer-thin turkey, 1tbsp black olives, 5 cherry tomatoes, ¼ cucumber, shredded lettuce, 1tsp pumpkin seeds and a splash of lemon juice.

Wed: Chicken and quinoa pesto salad

Combine 1 cooked, sliced chicken breast, 100g cooked quinoa, 1 sliced celery stick, lemon juice and ½ a chopped pear. Serve with pesto made from 20g cashew nuts, 10g sunflower seeds, 1 handful of spinach, 3 basil leaves and 1tsp olive oil, blitzed.



Thur: Grilled chicken and slaw

Slaw made up of sliced red cabbage, grated carrot, grated apple, grated raw beetroot, lemon juice, olive oil (to your liking) and 25g of crushed roasted hazelnuts, served with 1 grilled chicken breast.

Fri: Butternut squash, coconut and chilli soup

SEE RECIPES.

Sat: Baked sweet potato with Mexican tuna

SEE RECIPES.

Sun: North African egg and butter bean salad

SEE RECIPES.

Dinner

Mon: Spicy chicken with quinoa

Coat 1 chicken breast with mix of ½tsp curry powder, ¼tsp cinnamon powder, ½ chopped garlic clove and 3tbsp probiotic yoghurt. Grill the chicken for 15 mins. Serve with wilted spinach, mango chutney and cooked quinoa.

Tue: Veggie salad

Cut 2 carrots lengthways and sprinkle with ½tsp each of cumin seeds, chilli flakes and za'atar. Roast for 20 mins at 200C/gas 7. Then, combine in a bowl with ½tbsp mustard, juice of ½ a lemon, 125g cooked beluga lentils, 1 handful of rocket and 1 tbsp chopped dill.

Wed: Smoky stuffed aubergine

Score the flesh of ½ aubergine and season with salt and smoked paprika. Bake for 20 mins at 180°C/gas 6.

Scoop out the flesh and mix with 125g ready-cooked quinoa, 5 halved cherry tomatoes, 4 chopped dried apricots, 5 chopped black olives, 1tbsp olive oil, ½ a lemon, juiced, and salt. Place mixture back into the skins.

Thur: Spicy salmon burgers

Chop up 1 skinless salmon fillet and combine with ¼ lemongrass stick (chopped), 1cm piece of ginger (finely chopped) and 1tsp Sriracha sauce. Form mixture into 2 patties and fry in a non-stick pan. Serve with a salad.

Fri: Sweet potato and lentil curry

Fry ½ garlic clove, ½tbsp grated ginger and 1 chopped spring onion for 3 mins. Add 50g red lentils, ½ peeled and cubed sweet potato, 50g cherry tomatoes, 3 cardamom pods, 2 cloves, ½tsp turmeric and cook for 3 more mins. Add 100ml veg stock and 100ml coconut milk. Simmer for 20 mins.

Sat: Black bean chilli

SEE RECIPES.

Sun: Cod with avocado salsa

SEE RECIPES.

BUTTERNUT SQUASH, COCONUT AND CHILLI SOUP

Serves 1

- Butternut squash ½, peeled and diced
- Red onion ½, sliced
- Vegetable stock 300ml
- Coconut milk 100ml
- Dried chilli flakes pinch

1 Roast the butternut squash and onion together in the oven for

20 mins at 180C/gas 6.

2 Once the vegetables are cooked, pour the stock and coconut milk into a medium saucepan and bring to the boil. Add the vegetables and chilli flakes to the pan, then take off the heat.

3 Blitz the mixture until smooth.



ROASTED COD WITH CUCUMBER AND AVOCADO SALSA

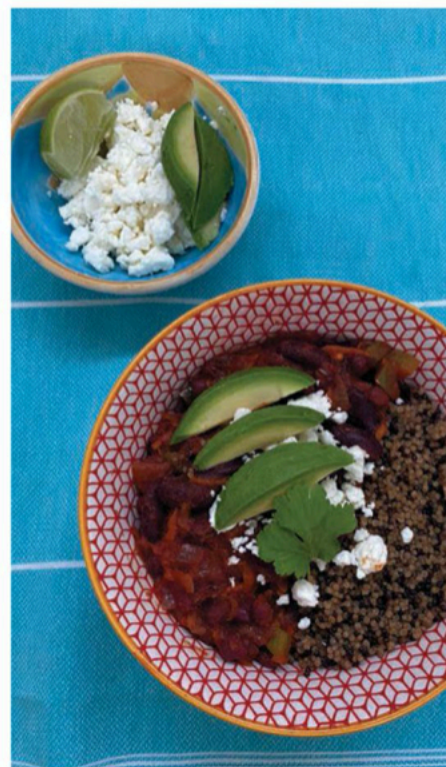
Serves 1

- Skinless and boneless cod fillet 1
- Cucumber ¼, peeled, seeded and finely diced
- Green chilli ½, finely chopped
- Avocado ½, chopped
- Fresh coriander 1tbsp, chopped
- Lime 1, juiced
- Light olive oil 2tsp
- Salt

1 Heat the oven to 200C/gas 7 and roast the cod for 20 mins.

2 Place all other ingredients in a bowl and combine. Drizzle over cod when cooked.

3 Serve with a cooked quinoa (optional).



BLACK BEAN CHILLI

Serves 1

- Olive oil 1tsp
- Garlic clove 1, chopped
- Small red onion ½, chopped
- Chilli powder 1tsp
- Smoked paprika ¼tsp
- Carrot ½, grated
- Green pepper ½, diced
- Passata 175g
- Black beans ½ can
- Red kidney beans ¼ can
- Cooked quinoa 100g
- Avocado ¼, sliced
- Feta cheese 30g

1 Heat the oil in a small saucepan and add the garlic and onion. Cook for 2 mins.

2 Add the spices, then stir for 1 min.

3 Add the carrot, pepper, passata and beans. Bring to the boil, then reduce the heat and cook for 20 mins – you can add a little water during cooking if necessary.

4 Serve with the cooked quinoa and top with avocado and crumbled feta.

NORTH AFRICAN EGG AND BUTTER BEAN SALAD

Serves 2

- **Large eggs** 2
- **Lemon** 1, juiced
- **Garlic cloves** 4, 1 crushed, 3 finely chopped
- **Tahini** 2 tbsp
- **Extra virgin olive oil** 1tbsp
- **Red onion** 1, finely sliced
- **Ground cumin** 1tsp
- **Coriander seeds** ½tsp
- **Butter beans** 400g, can
- **Little gem lettuce** 2, cut into wedges
- **Tomatoes** 2, cut into wedges
- **Aleppo pepper flakes** pinch
- **Flat-leaf parsley** handful, roughly chopped (optional)

1 Bring a saucepan of water to the boil. Lower in the eggs and boil for

8 mins. Drain the eggs and run under a cold tap, then peel and slice in half.

2 Meanwhile, mix 1tbsp lemon juice and 3 tbsp water with the crushed garlic clove and tahini to make a dressing.

3 Heat the oil in a frying pan and fry the onion and chopped garlic for 5 mins or until softened. Add the ground cumin and coriander seeds, stirring briefly, then add the butter beans. Taste and add lemon juice if needed. Season well.

4 Spoon the butter beans on to two plates with the little gem lettuce, then add the eggs and tomatoes. Drizzle the tahini dressing over the salad, along with the Aleppo pepper flakes and flat-leaf parsley, if using.



BAKED SWEET POTATO WITH MEXICAN TUNA

Serves 1

- **Large sweet potato** 1
- **Tuna in brine** 1 can, drained
- **Red kidney beans** 2 tbsp, chopped
- **Plain probiotic yoghurt** 1tbsp
- **Small spring onion** 1, finely sliced
- **Red chilli** ¼, chopped
- **Lime** ¼, juiced
- **Salt**

1 Heat the oven to 200C/gas 7 then roast the sweet potato for about 40 mins until tender.

2 Once the sweet potato is cooked, prepare the tuna mix by adding the remaining ingredients to a bowl and combining well.

3 Serve the tuna mix on top of the baked sweet potato.



Rob Hobson is head of Nutrition for Healthspan. Find out more at healthspan.co.uk