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Stay well this winter with winning meals

After a bumper cold and flu season last year, dietitians are urging Australians to boost their immune system this winter by tapping into nutritious comfort foods.

According to the Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA), focusing on whole foods, including those containing vitamin C, zinc and protein, can help immunity – a useful weapon in fighting off the germs that cause colds and flu.

Figures from the Department of Health show more than 14,000 cases of the flu were reported in Australia last year, a 36 per cent increase from the year before.ⁱ And the flu accounts for 13,500 hospitalizations and 3,000 deaths among Australians aged over 50 years.ⁱⁱ

While healthy eating may not ward off germs entirely, DAA spokesperson Simone Austin said making nutritious meals a priority in the colder months can reduce the likelihood and severity of colds.

She added that a nutritious diet is particularly important in vulnerable populations, such as the elderly, whose immune systems may already be compromised.

'Foods high in vitamin C include capsicum, broccoli, kiwi fruit, strawberries and citrus fruit. Zinc is found in fish, seafood, beef and lamb, which also provide good-quality protein. Baked beans and pumpkin seeds also provide zinc. So there's plenty of nutritious and tasty options.

'Now that winter has finally arrived, it's time to enjoy tasty, warming foods that give you, and your immune system, a boost,' said Ms Austin, an Accredited Practising Dietitian.

According to Ms Austin, a nutritious winter diet need not be expensive or complicated.

She recommends nourishing winter meals, such as:

- Beef and bean stew (see recipe below)
- Porridge topped with pumpkin seeds and chopped nuts
- Warming seafood soup with added dark leafy greens and slices of capsicum
- Grainy toast or a wholemeal muffin topped with baked beans
- Delicious fruit crumbles, using fresh or frozen berries.

For tailored nutrition advice on keeping healthy this winter, DAA recommends seeking the support of an Accredited Practising Dietitian.

ENDS

For further information or to organise an interview with Simone Austin, contact the Dietitians Association of Australia on 0409 661 920.

Italian Style Beef and Bean Stew

Ingredients:

(Serves 4)

Olive oil spray
500g extra lean beef strips
1 medium red onion, thinly sliced
2 yellow capsicums, sliced
410g can Italian-style chopped tomatoes with chilli and parsley
1/3 cup roughly chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
150g green beans, trimmed
Crusty bread, to serve

Method:

Spray a large saucepan with oil. Heat over high heat and cook beef for 4-5 minutes or until browned. Remove from pan.

Add onion and capsicum to pan. Cook for 5 minutes or until softened. Add tomatoes and 1/2 cup cold water. bring to the boil. Simmer, covered, for 5 minutes or until capsicum is tender.

Return beef to pan. Add beans and cook, covered for 5 minutes or until beans are tender. Serve sprinkled with parsley and a slice of crusty bread.

This recipe is from **Healthy Food Guide** magazine.

‘Fight winter weight gain with this hearty, high-protein stew. It’s high in fibre, which is good for heart health, and it keeps you feeling full,’ said Brooke Longfield, *Healthy Food Guide’s* Accredited Practising Dietitian.

To access an image, contact Maree Hall at DAA on prmanager@daa.asn.au.

ⁱ Australian Government, Department of Health. National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System. Viewed 2 June 2016
<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/cda-surveil-nndss-nndssintro.htm>

ⁱⁱ Australian Government, Department of Health. Influenza. Viewed 2 June 2016.
<http://www.immunise.health.gov.au/internet/immunise/publishing.nsf/Content/immunise-influenza>