

These immunity-boosting Japanese ingredients are what everyone needs right now!

National, XX December 2020: According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the average life expectancy in Japan is 84 years; where women can expect to live till 87 and men 81. This by far is the highest age when compared to other nations. Now you may want to know what is the secret potion? It is nothing but their diet and eating habits.

Most of the traditional Japanese dishes have a balanced portion of antioxidants, vitamins, minerals, and even beneficial bacteria (for optimal gut health). Therefore, rather than depending on manufactured immunity-boosting alternatives, one should add these natural ingredients to their diet to amplify their immunity.

Matcha, a fine powder extracted from the green tea leaves are consumed with water in Japan since the 12th century. While there is a traditional tea ceremony of elegantly preparing and serving matcha tea in a step-by-step process, but in modern-day Japan, matcha can be found in various assortments. The tea is filled with vitamin C and L-theanine—an amino acid that is known to boost metabolism, alleviate joint pain and improve overall mental focus. Medically, matcha is also known to reduce cell damage and fight chronic diseases.

Miso is such another traditional Japanese seasoning produced by fermenting soybeans with salt and *kōji* (the fungus *Aspergillus oryzae*) and sometimes rice, barley, seaweed, or other ingredients. Miso is known to come in different types which depends on the fermentation duration and secondary ingredients. Miso is believed to be a great source of probiotics or beneficial bacteria, which improves the health of your gut and immune system. Miso is also high in protein, minerals and many more vitamins like- manganese and zinc, and vitamin E, vitamin K, various B vitamins, and folic acid.

Kaiso, also known as a family of marine-growing plants (seaweed) is consumed in many different forms in Japan. Konbu(Kelp), a tough slab of dried seaweed, is used for making broth, and not usually consumed directly. There are many other types and names of seaweed that are consumed in different ways all across Japan. They are a great supplement of vitamins and minerals, with minimal calories. Seaweed contains vitamins A, B, C, and E and is also a rich source of iron, protein, and fiber. Seaweed is also high in iodine that helps with thyroid and prevents hyperthyroidism.

Another very nutritious ingredient is natto, which is made of fermented soybeans and has a sticky and slippery texture. Due to this, it is either liked by some or “Disliked” by others”. Natto is an incredibly nutritious food that's worth acquiring a taste for. It is believed that Natto is a huge contributor to the longevity of Japanese people. It can either be consumed raw or as an addition to a dish. Being fermented soya, it is high in protein and has great quantities of gut-friendly bacteria. Natto reduces the risk of heart attacks and stroke as it contains an enzyme that helps break down proteins involved in blood clotting. The abundance of vitamin K2 improves bone health and prevents osteoporosis (brittle bones).

Pickled plums, also known as Umeboshi are sour in taste and tangy. Umeboshi once came in sour flavor are now available in different varieties of sour-ness and salty-ness as well as sour-sweet. They are usually consumed with rice to contrast with its sharp taste. It is believed that centuries ago it was used to purify water, cure dysentery, and fight typhoid fever. Consumption of Umeboshi is advised to prevent liver disorders.

Another healthier alternative of rice in Japan is Zakkoku Mai. Zakkoku means “millet” or “grains”, and mai is rice. Zakkoku rice is a mix of regular white or brown rice combined with millet, barley, quinoa, oats, and other similar seeds and grains. Millet and whole grains present in zakkoku rice provide sufficient amounts of fiber, which helps to control blood sugar, lower bad cholesterol, and improve digestive health. This essential daily ingredient in a meal adds minerals such as iron, magnesium, and zinc.

We could add a few of these edible ingredients in our daily routine to boost our immunity which can further increase our lifespan. When it is open or right to travel, one can experience same in more authentic way while being in Japan. This will keep us overall fit and strong.

About Japan National Tourism Organization:

The Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) was founded in 1964 with the mission of enticing foreign travelers to Japan. Affiliated with the Japan Tourism Agency of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, JNTO has effectively functioned as the Japanese government bureau of tourism. It has a total of 21 tourism-promotion-oriented offices across the world, and a large network of suppliers for tourism and event services in Japan. The Japan Convention Bureau (JCB), within JNTO, gathers professionals dedicated to attracting international conferences and incentive tours to Japan, located in 6 strategic offices.

JNTO Website: <https://www.japan.travel/en/in/>

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