

Easy-to-make foods that boost immune system in children

TODDLER

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A diverse diet is vital to boost gut health and immunity. Prepare healthy snacks for your child by including berries, yogurt, milk, nuts and seeds, and fruits for sufficient nutrients.

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It's a joy indeed, watching your child's developing appetite. The kid that once couldn't stand fried eggs now can't get enough of them; watching a notoriously picky eater develop an adventurous taste in new foods feels like a triumph.

Parents always strive to ensure that their growing child gets all the nutrition they can get, in order to develop well. They hardly notice that their kid's immune system is one of the first parts of their kid to benefit from a diverse diet.

Having a healthy immune system means your child will be protected against infections and won't be down with the sniffles and colds as often as a lot of children do - especially once they reach school-going age. A key way to build up your child's immune system includes eating the right kinds of food that boost gut health.

It can be difficult to get children to eat lots of healthy food. But like your kid growing up, their immunity-boosting diet needs to walk before it can run. Here are some easy-to-eat snacks you can feed them which will help to boost their immune system.

Yoghurt

Probiotics are a form of good bacteria in our gut; keeping our gut filled with such bacteria is essential for a healthy immune system. This is because around 70% of our body's immune cells are located in the gut.¹ So giving your child foods that are rich in probiotics will boost their immunity.

Yoghurt is one such food; it's the perfect snack choice for children, as they can be bought in kid-size portions and a variety of flavours, or even as a yoghurt drink. A study showed that children who took yoghurt drinks had a 19% lower risk of colds, ear infections and strep throat.²

Get the no-added-sugar or low-sugar variety, so your child doesn't get an unnecessary helping of sugar. Or you could get plain Greek yoghurt, which is an extremely healthy choice, and serve it with fruits or even a bit of vanilla extract.

Berries

It doesn't matter if it's strawberries, blueberries, raspberries or blackberries that your child loves – all of them will boost their immune system. Not only are berries rich in antioxidants, they also have high amounts of vitamin A and vitamin C, two vitamins that are beneficial for your child's immune system.³ Make smoothies or shakes out of them, add them to a serving of yoghurt, or just serve them in a bowl for a mid-morning snack. If you can't find fresh berries, frozen ones are fine too.

Nuts & Seeds

These foods are packed with immune-boosting nutrients such as vitamin E, vitamin B6 and manganese, as well as healthy fats. Almonds and walnuts are especially recommended here, as they are extremely high in such nutrients. Plus, research has shown that almonds have prebiotic properties too, which will help increase the presence of probiotics in the gut.⁴

Seeds like pumpkin and sunflower contain vitamin E, zinc and omega 3 fatty acids, which are all beneficial for the immune system. Add nuts or seeds to smoothies, use as toppings for yoghurt, or just serve them in a bowl for a snack. Use nut butter spreads – such as peanut butter – for sandwich snacks, or make your own trail mix with your child's favourite nuts and seeds.

If you enjoy baking, add nuts and seeds to cookies or muffins to add a healthy touch to these snacks. Note that nuts and seeds can be choking hazards for younger children, so ensure that they're cut into smaller pieces. And also be sure that your child doesn't have a nut allergy.

Milk

A glass of milk is a healthy snack at any time of the day and, if you pick the right kind of formula milk for your toddler, their immune system will benefit too. For example,

look out for oligosaccharides, a group of special sugars that support your child's digestive and immune development.

Research has shown that the oligosaccharide 2'-FL (2'-Fucosyllactose) works especially well as a stimulant for good intestinal bacteria.⁵ This leads to a balanced gut environment, which then strengthens the immune system. Babies that have been fed formula with 2'-FL were shown to have stronger immune systems with less respiratory infections.⁶ Also, babies who drink milk supplemented with 2'-FL have immune development and regulation levels similar to breastfed babies.⁷

Fruits

Most kids love to snack on fruits - so why not pick those that have immune-boosting qualities too? Fruits loaded in vitamin C are especially beneficial as this vitamin increases the production of white blood cells, which are important when fighting infections.⁸ Citrus fruits like oranges, clementines or grapefruit are recommended, as well as papayas. Serve them in pureed or solid form, depending on the age of your child.

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