**Immunity-Boosting Snacks for Kids**

By [R. Morgan Griffin](http://www.webmd.com/r-morgan-griffin)

Could the snacks you feed your kids cut their chances of getting sick? Healthy things in everyday foods -- from yogurt to walnuts -- may help boost a kid's natural defenses.

"We know that what you eat has a clear impact on your immunity," says Leo A. Heitlinger MD, chair of the American Academy of Pediatrics section on gastroenterology, hepatology, and [nutrition](http://www.webmd.com/diet/default.htm). So whether you're arming your kid for [cold and flu](http://www.webmd.com/cold-and-flu/default.htm) season or just aiming for good, year-round health, immune-boosting snacks may help.

**5 Foods That Boost Immunity**

* Yogurt. Yogurt contains helpful germs called [probiotics](http://www.webmd.com/diet/features/answers-to-your-questions-about-probiotics). You may already know that these critters live in your gut and can improve the way your body uses food. But they're also important in helping your body fight sickness. One study found that kids who had a yogurt drink had a 19% lower risk of [colds](http://www.webmd.com/cold-and-flu/ss/slideshow-cold-or-flu), [ear infections](http://www.webmd.com/cold-and-flu/ear-infection/default.htm), and [strep throat](http://www.webmd.com/oral-health/understanding-strep-throat-basics).  
    
  What type of yogurt should you get? Heitlinger suggests looking for brands that say they contain live cultures. "If it's separated when you open it, and there's a little liquid on top, that's a good sign," he says.
* Kefir. This tart milk drink also packs lots of healthy [probiotics](http://www.webmd.com/digestive-disorders/probiotics-15/slideshow-probiotics). While the biting taste can be a surprise at first, it's catching on in the U.S. "You can buy it in single-size packages that you could pack in your kid's lunchbox," says Jennifer McDaniel, MS, RD, a spokesperson for the Academy of [Nutrition](http://www.webmd.com/diet/rm-quiz-nutrition-iq) and Dietetics. There isn’t much proof about kefir yet. But early research suggests it can help your immune system.
* Walnuts. Walnuts have healthy omega-3 fatty acids, which are good for you in lots of ways. Experts believe that omega-3s help your body fight illness. One small study found omega-3s cut the number of respiratory infections in kids. Walnuts are easy to sprinkle into a snack mix or on cereal.
* Fruits and veggies. To help your immune system, McDaniel suggests aiming for ones that are high in [vitamin C](http://www.webmd.com/vitamins-supplements/ingredientmono-1001-vitamin+c+ascorbic+acid.aspx?activeingredientid=1001&activeingredientname=vitamin+c+(ascorbic+acid)), like citrus fruits, strawberries, bell peppers, broccoli, and sweet potatoes. Experts aren’t entirely sure how much vitamin C helps [colds](http://www.webmd.com/cold-and-flu/rm-quiz-truth-common-cold) and [flu](http://symptoms.webmd.com/cold-and-flu-map-tool/rm-quiz-difference-cold-flu).
* Lean meats. You might not think of a leftover pork chop as a snack -- or that it would boost your body’s disease fighting system. But lean meats can help. First of all, they have protein, which is important for keeping up strength. Second, lean meats also contain zinc, which seems to help white [blood cells](http://www.webmd.com/heart/anatomy-picture-of-blood) fight off infections, McDaniel says.

**Tips for Boosting Immunity With Foods**

* Choose a range of healthy foods. Don't get hung up on this month's hottest superfood, like a berry or grain that supposedly works miracles, McDaniel says. It may be healthy, but it's not going to be a cure-all. Instead, offer kids a range of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and lean proteins.
* More isn't better. If one kiwi is good, that doesn't mean your kid should eat 10. Mega-dosing with foods won’t help. Once your kid's body has what it needs, the rest gets wasted. It's like pumping gas into a tank that's already full.
* Know the limits. Remember, no food can prevent [colds](http://www.webmd.com/cold-and-flu/video/myths-and-facts-about-colds) and [flu](http://www.webmd.com/cold-and-flu/video/myths-and-facts-about-flu). No food can cure them, either. So if your kid gets sick, it's not a sign that you didn’t give him a diet that was healthy enough. It's just life.
* Go for whole foods. Sure, orange juice has vitamin C, but your kid is better off with an orange instead. It has vitamin C and a lot more. "You get a lot more [nutrients](http://www.webmd.com/a-to-z-guides/major-nutrients-in-food-topic-overview) from the whole food than you would from a juice or supplement," says McDaniel says. There are lots of healthy natural chemicals in foods that we haven't isolated in pills or juices -- or that we even know about yet.