

How to Boost Your Athlete's Immunity This Flu Season

Cold and flu season is here, and it can be a struggle to keep your young athlete healthy as their friends and classmates start getting sick. As all sport parents know, a good defense requires a good offense, so here are a few simple [nutritional tips](#) to help boost your child's immunity this season and hopefully keep them in school and in sport.

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[Fruits and vegetables](#) can be powerful medicine. TrueSport Expert Kristen Ziesmer, a registered dietitian and board-certified specialist in sports dietetics, recommends eating at least five servings of fruits and vegetables daily from all the colors of the rainbow – preferably, two fruits and three vegetables.

This helps ensure that your child is getting the vitamins they need to stay healthy: vitamins A, C, and E are all critical to a high-functioning immune system.

Add Zinc-Containing Foods

[Researchers have found](#) that zinc can boost immune function in children, yet globally, one in six people are deficient in the mineral. Foods high in zinc include red meat, shellfish, chickpeas, lentils, hemp seeds, cashews, and dairy. If you have a picky eater, try these delicious options:

- Granola or oatmeal with low-fat milk
- DIY trail mix: cheerios, raisins, peanuts
- Peanut butter on whole grain bread
- Turkey, ham, or roast beef sandwich on whole grain bread
- Hamburger on a whole grain bun

Limit Processed Foods

The Cleveland Clinic [also recommends](#) limiting processed foods for your young athlete, as the gut bacteria that thrive on highly-processed sugars aren't as immune-system-boosting as the bacteria that thrive on a healthier, high-fiber diet.

Ziesmer recommends limiting processed foods since they are high in sugar and low in fiber, protein, vitamins, and antioxidants. She states, "The low fiber content is problematic for the gut microbiome because the good bacteria are not receiving the food they need to thrive. Instead, the bad bacteria feed on the sugars in processed foods and multiply at a rate that outnumber the good bacteria. As a result, it can weaken the immune system."

Encourage your athlete to consume more whole foods, including brightly colored fruits and veggies, as well as zinc-rich foods.

Add Pre and Probiotic-Rich Foods

Probiotics – live, helpful bacteria that are naturally found in your body, can also help boost a child's immunity during cold and flu season. A [recent study](#) on allergy prevention and treatment shows a decrease in upper respiratory infections in people using probiotics, and they can [guard](#)

[against viral infections](#). Rather than popping a pill, introduce fermented foods like sauerkraut, kefir, yogurt, kombucha, and kimchi. If you have a picky eater, consult your family physician to get a recommendation on whether a probiotic is right for your child.

Ziesmer adds, “Prebiotics provide probiotics with food. These include foods like bananas, garlic, onions, whole wheat bread, and asparagus.”

Bonus Tip: Remind Them to Wash Their Hands

Proper hand-washing is the [number one recommendation](#) when it comes to preventing the flu from spreading, so even with a boosted immune system, it’s still important to help your athlete get in the habit of washing their hands frequently and effectively by rubbing soapy hands with warm water for at least 20 seconds.

While you can never completely safeguard against your child getting sick during the cold and flu months, with a few simple preventative measures – that are all healthy habits anyway – you can help boost their immune system.



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