

# Can food help boost your immune system?

Unfortunately, eating excessive amounts of cruciferous vegetables, green smoothies or vitamin supplementation will not boost your immune system and prevent COVID-19. Vaccines are the only way to teach your immune system to fight COVID-19.

## So, what can we do?

We can try to keep our bodies and our immune system healthy by getting adequate sleep, exercising daily and eating a balanced diet. With children at home and the routine of school altered it can be very challenging time. Creating a new routine for lockdown can help support children to meet their daily needs of exercise, sleep and nutrition.



### Exercise

Exercise is super important for children especially during times of uncertainty! It can help reduce anxiety and stress, support muscle and bone growth, improve concentration, decrease the risk of unhealthy weight gain and get children outdoors. Children between 5 and 17 years should aim for 60 minutes of moderate activity - including muscle strengthening. Some examples include brisk walking, bike riding or trampolining. In addition, an unlimited amount of light activity is recommended daily, some examples include walking the dog or helping with chores around the house. We could all use some extra help around the house! With playgrounds reopened and better weather around the corner these goals might be a little easier to achieve. For more ideas on encouraging children to move click [here](#).

### Sleep

Sleep is super important for growth and development in children. When the body is at rest growth hormone is activated. Keeping consistent sleep routines and avoiding screen time 1 hour prior to bedtime can help ensure children are getting a good night's rest. Aim for 9 -11 hours for children aged 5-13 years and 8-10 hours for older children. Make it part of your child's routine to set an alarm clock and encourage children, especially teens to wake up the same time each day. This will prevent oversleeping and help maintain daily routines.

### Nutrition

There is no one food that will boost your immune system or one diet to follow! Taking vitamin supplements is also not recommended unless you are deficient. If you want to keep your immune system healthy it's simply a matter of following a healthy balanced diet and limiting highly processed foods loaded with unhealthy fat, sodium and added sugar. Eating a well-balanced diet will provide a range of beneficial immune supporting vitamins and minerals including vitamins A, C, E, zinc, selenium, B group vitamins and iron. For more information on food sources click [here](#).



Let's not forget the "sunshine" vitamin, Vitamin D. Our bodies can synthesis vitamin D after exposure of the skin to sunlight. 80% of our Vitamin D comes from the sun and that's why spending time outdoors is essential to maintaining an adequate supply. A lack of vitamin D can lead to symptoms of lethargy, fatigue, muscle weakness and mood changes. Some excellent food sources include eggs, mushrooms, oily fish (salmon & tuna) and fortified milks.

### Balanced diet

To achieve a healthy balanced diet for your children, aim to include food from each of the five food groups daily! For the recommended serving amounts for your child click [here](#).

### Recommend serves from each food group for 4-8 year olds



### What a serve looks like

- Fruit = 1 medium size piece (150g) or 1 cup of fruit or 2 smaller pieces of fruit
- Vegetables = 1 cup salad veg or 1/2 cup cooked veg
- Dairy = 1 cup milk or 3/4 cup yoghurt or 2 slices cheese
- Grains = 1 slice of bread or 1/2 cup cooked rice, pasta, porridge 2/3 cup dry cereal
- Protein foods = 1 cup baked beans or 2 eggs or palm size lean meat or chicken

### Final thoughts!

With lockdown comes easier access to food, creating an environment which supports overconsumption! To help reduce excess snacking during the day, why not continue to maintain the routine and pack a school lunch box for your children each day. This will provide some familiarity, provide a balanced diet and help support home learning routines.

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