

Keep Your Kids Healthy This Winter

By Keri Glassman, MS, RD, CDN

Nutritionist Keri Glassman shares the best steps to keep the sniffles and sneezes away during the cold season

Wash hands regularly: You've heard it before and you'll hear it again – and again! Hand-washing is the key to staying healthy. Encourage your child to wash his or her hands with soap regularly, not just after using the bathroom. A child should wash up after being outside, after coughing or sneezing, or after playing with other children. (Note: I don't recommend Purell for kids due to its alcohol content which could possibly cause a burn if a child gets some in his or her eyes. Also, if ingested, it can lead to alcohol poisoning.)



Get adequate vitamin C: There is no conclusive research showing that vitamin C prevents colds, but it may reduce the severity and duration of cold and flu symptoms. Don't overdo the vitamin C, since too much can cause diarrhea. You can offer your kids vitamin C in a supplemental form or via citrus fruits such as oranges and grapefruits. The RDA for Vitamin C for children ages 4 to 8 is 25mg/d (UL is 650mg) and children ages 9 to 13 is 45 mg /d (UL is 1200mg). Kids' supplements usually contain anywhere from 25 to 50mg per tablet. Other ways to help your kid get enough C: An average orange contains about 70mg; a half cup of red pepper has 95 mg; one medium mango has 30mg; a half-cup of strawberries has 50mg. Other produce that can provide vitamin C includes persimmon, papaya, tomato, apple, cabbage, and broccoli.

Think zinc: The studies are inconclusive on the effect of zinc on colds and the flu, but many people believe it helps ward off or lessen the severity of illness. Good dietary sources of zinc include meat (3 oz contains ~ 4mg), beans (½ cup contains 1.8mg), lentils, whole-grain cereals (¾ cup contains 15mg), and nuts (1 oz walnuts or almonds contains 1 mg). The upper limit for zinc intake for children 1-3 years is 7mg, 12 mg for 4-8 year olds, and 23 mg for 9-13 year olds.

Try probiotics: Probiotics means the “friendly” bacteria that grow in the gut and promote good digestion, facilitate the absorption of nutrients, boost the immune system and help prevent an overgrowth of more harmful organisms in the digestive tract. Probiotics can be taken as a daily supplement (Florastor Kids) or can be found in certain foods (cultured or fermented foods, such as cheese, buttermilk and yogurt). If your child has had a course of antibiotics, you may want to give them probiotics over the following two weeks to replace the beneficial bacteria that the medication may have knocked out. Also consider probiotics if your child has had a bout of diarrhea. Diarrhea can flush out the intestinal bacte-

ria, including the “good” ones, which you can replenish by giving your child probiotics. Yogurt is a great natural source of probiotics. Try Stonyfield Farms YoBaby yogurt cups and smoothies or YoKids organic yogurt for older children.

Get enough sleep: As a parent, you are probably well aware of how important enough rest is to a child in terms of his or her energy level and behavior. But being well-rested can help the immune system stay stronger and be in better shape to fight germs that cause you to get sick. Most toddlers sleep about 10-14 hours, and preschoolers sleep about 10-12 hours. Preschoolers may no longer need naps, but can substitute with some “quiet time” instead. Having a regular bedtime, a consistent sleep schedule, and a relaxing bedtime routine will help ready your kids for sleep and maximize the hours that they get.

Eat a balanced diet: Eating a balanced diet can help the immune system stay stronger and be in better shape to fight germs that cause you to get sick. Nutrient deficiencies weaken the immune system. Ensure that your child is getting enough vitamins and minerals for optimal immune system functioning by giving them a balanced and varied diet, with lots of fruits and vegetables. Make sure you set a good example by eating fruits and vegetables yourself—children are more likely to try these foods if they see you eating them. You can also try to “sneak” veggies into soups, sandwiches, stirfrys, or sauces for your kids. Children also love dipping! Offer them cut up veggies with a low fat dip or cut up fruit with a yogurt or natural peanut butter dip for snacks.

Get in fluids: Drinking water and other non-caffeinated beverages can keep you hydrated and make you feel better, especially if you are already sick or have a fever. When your kids are not feeling well, it is especially important to increase their fluid intake. Children lose more fluids than usual when they are sick and replacing them is critical to getting them back on their feet! Remember, kids sports drinks and juices are often loaded with sugar, so go for plain water when possible!

Get in enough exercise: During cold season, you may be tempted to keep your little one at home, away from all those germs, but in truth, physical activity—ice-skating, skiing, building a snowman, even indoor activities—can help the immune system stay stronger to fight germs that cause you to get sick.